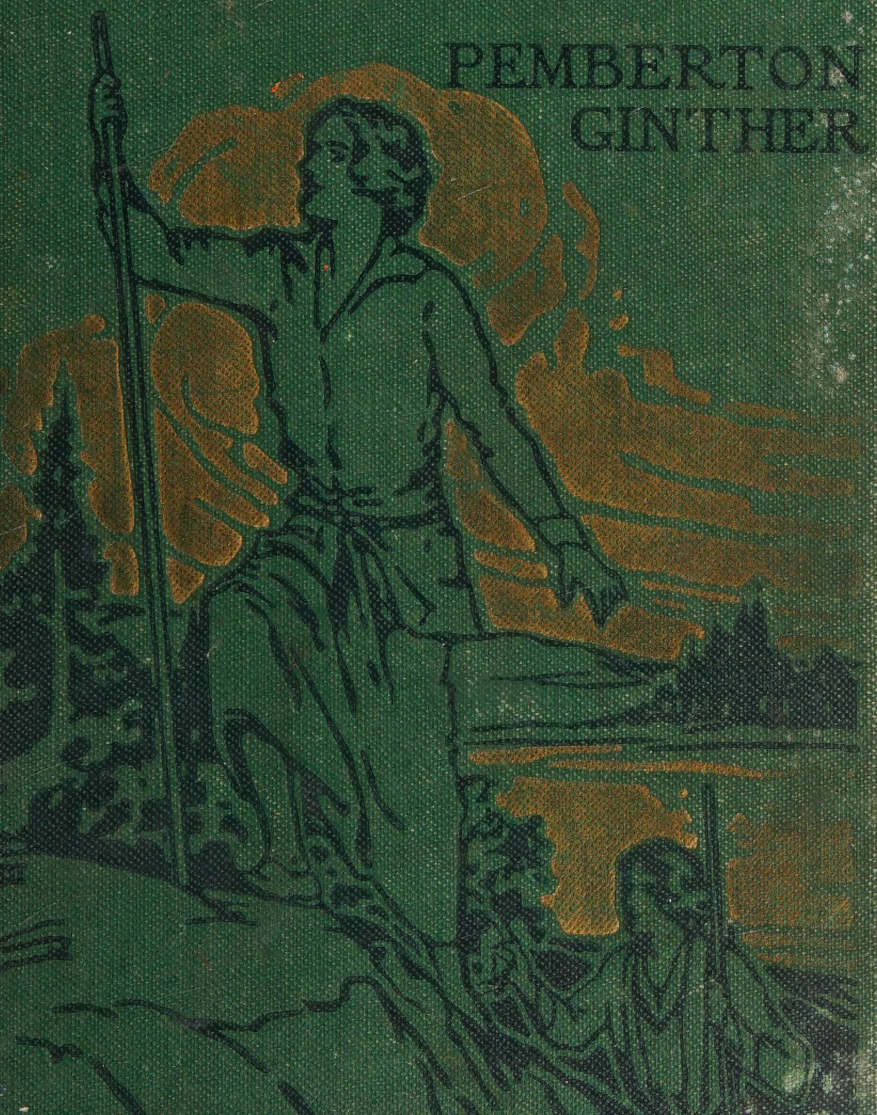


BETSY HALE

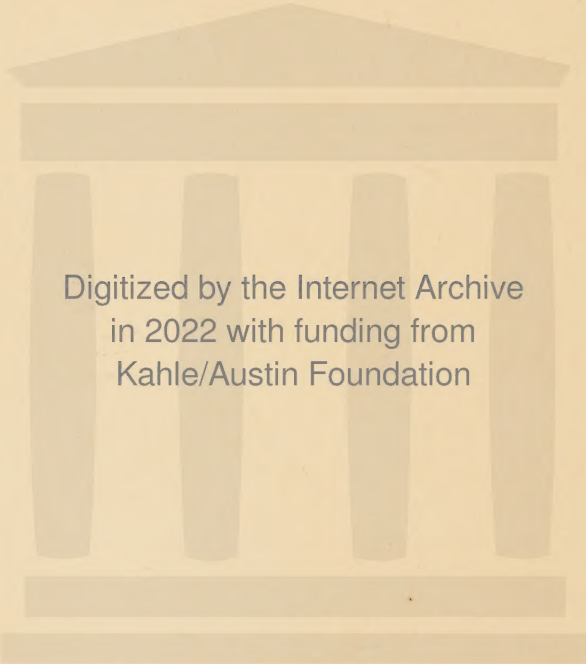
PEMBERTON
GINTHER



From Bill
to Filly

Xmas 1925

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BETSY HALE



BETSY HALE

BETSY HALE

By
PEMBERTON GINTHER

Author of The Miss Pat Series, etc.



*ILLUSTRATIONS
BY THE AUTHOR*

PHILADELPHIA
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PUBLISHERS

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Betsy Hale

CHAPTER I

EXIT MINNIE

“**T**HERE now, you’re all ready,” said Betsy with a nod and a wave of the toasting fork.

She was so pleased with her work that she blew a kiss to the tray standing on the well-scrubbed deal table.

“You dear thing, you look perfectly lovely!” she murmured, cocking her head to get the full effect. “And I did you all myself.”

The tray was not really a beautiful tray at all. It was made of heavy enameled tin, and the white cloth that covered it was quite coarse; the china was of the plainest, and the spoons were not mates; but to Betsy’s eyes it was a masterpiece. She smiled triumphantly.

“Mother will see that I can do it as well as Minnie ever did,” she said.

She saw no flaw in it. She did not notice that the slices of lemon were thick and uneven, or that the cake was a trifle crumbly. She liked the way the soda crackers were laid on the long dish—a celery dish off duty—and she admired the heavy blue cream jug that stood beside the fine old silver teapot and bowl.

“It’s such fun to keep house,” she said fervently, stooping to watch the funny-twisted reflection of her own face in the curving sides of the teapot. She laughed aloud, and the face grinned, too, as the the old clock on the shelf took up the measure.

“It’s fun—it’s fun—it’s fun to keep house,” it ticked comfortably, while the bubbling kettle sang a steamy accompaniment.

Out of doors a brisk, house-cleaning March wind was blowing, and the fire in the square-topped shining cook-stove crackled and chuckled in response. The sunny old-fashioned kitchen was full of little creaking sounds, such as very old houses always have when one takes time to notice.

Betsy listened with parted lips.

"It sounds as if the place were *purring*," she said. "How nice and cosy it is. I wonder I never heard it before."

She knew quite well it was because she had never been alone there before, but she preferred to think it was because the old kitchen knew that she was happy in it. She looked about with a great pride of possession.

"It's lovely to have a house all your own," she murmured, happily.

She was sure the sun had never shone so brightly as it did through the sparkling panes of the small windows. The coarse blue china on the old gray dresser looked beautiful to her, and the gay sprays of painted flowers on the backs of the wide wooden settle and worn wooden chairs gave her as much pleasure as any florist's window she had ever seen.

"A kitchen is a wonderful place—when you understand it," she said thoughtfully. "Yet everyone in town hated them. Even the Domestic Science girls said they couldn't bear a regular kitchen after the fine big cooking place at college. Kitchens are like some people, I guess. You have to get acquainted with them to really like them."

She looked all around the kitchen again, noticing things she had overlooked before.

"Yes, one must get acquainted," she said positively.

She was so small and slight that it was hard to believe she was almost fourteen, although she had an odd little air of wisdom which came from being much with books and people beyond her years. And, in spite of the childish curve of her sensitive mouth, you could see at once that she was a decided person in her own way. Her nice nose had some very positive little freckles on it. Her forget-me-not blue eyes were direct and steady. Her thick brown hair hung straight and shining, bound about her shapely head with a sober brown ribbon. Everything about her was sincere and thorough-going.

And yet she had imagination.

She had plenty of it, too, for she did not at all realize that the kitchen was a shabby place; nor that her dull brown linen dress was a very plain dress indeed; nor that the broad-toed shoes were several sizes too wide for her slender springing feet. She smoothed the dull dress and settled the sober bow on her

rich hair, and she smiled and nodded and threw kisses to the plain clean tray on the plain clean table, glowing at it with as much satisfaction as though it were Aladdin's massy silver tray with the twenty massy silver dishes.

"It's quite as nice as Minnie ever made it," she repeated with emphasis. "I wonder what Mother will say when she hears she has gone? I wish I didn't have to tell her right away."

A line came into her smooth forehead as she glanced at a note lying near the tray. It was a cocked-hat note and was written on ruled pink paper and was addressed in a sprawling hand, "Mrs. Hale, Present."

"She's a scrabbly writer, even if she did know a lot about cooking and things," said Betsy, frowning at the pink missive. "I hope she hasn't said anything mean—about being worked to death, or a cottage in a wilderness. She was always grumbling the last few days, though she was nice enough when we first came. She changed a lot in a week."

She poked the note with the toasting fork,

as though it were responsible. She stared at it with her head on one side like a bright bird, and then like a bird before it sings, she gave her brown head a quick little quirk. That meant she had made a decision.

"I know what I am going to do with you," she said firmly. "You shan't spoil our tea, if I can help it."

She tucked the note behind the old clock, and though the anxious line still showed between her eyes, she seemed better satisfied.

"I won't tell Mother at first," she planned. "I'll be so di-verting she won't miss Minnie—she doesn't notice much, thank goodness. After tea when she's dreadfully comfortable, I'll get around to it somehow. Surprises like that are horrid when you are tired, and poor Mother is always pretty tired now. She never laughs out loud and she hardly sings at all."

She stood absently staring at the bubbling kettle and tapping the table with the long fork as she thought of the change that had come to her gay, girlish mother in the three long years since her father's death.

"It's dreadful to be broken down," she

thought sadly. "It means that you can't do anything you like, though you go on working all you dare. And you get thin and white, and when you smile your nice, crinkly smiles, there are creases in the corners of your mouth where the dimples used to be."

She did not hear the cosy purring now, for her mind was slipping back piecing together scraps of memory and trying to understand. There was a sharp little ache in the corner of her heart where the memory of her father was, for they had been great chums, though Betsy had been only ten and he had been one of the cleverest professors at the big university. She sighed and then glowed and smiled.

"Wasn't he big and strong, though?" she thought, wistfully. "We did have such good times on our picnics in the park and at the Zoo. Mother always wanted to go, but she never had time."

A confused recollection of the many claims on her pretty mother's time troubled her for a moment, but she shook it off. "There were so many committee meetings and reform things, and of course they all wanted her. It wouldn't have been right for her to stay

away. But she's dropped them all since she went into the Truth and Simplicity League," she said with a satisfied air. "All we think about now is to be simple-minded and friendly and all that. It's about all she could do, anyway, since she's always slaving for that old publishing house now."

Betsy had never been quite clear how far this League, which Mrs. Hale had gone into about a year ago, had been the cause for their altered way of living. She knew that about the time her mother became interested in it they had moved from the big city and had gone to a small town in the north. She knew that they had begun to live very plainly, and that her pretty frocks, as they wore out, were replaced by the dull linen garb with the broad-toed shoes, which she had accepted as part of their devotion to the League.

It was at this time, too, that her own name of Elizabeth had given place to the plainer one of Betsy, as a proof their entire simplicity. Betsy liked it, though she remembered how some of her mother's friends had cried out against it, and how the girls in the public school where she went at this period used to

giggle over it. There, too, in that dull little town, her mother's vivid health began to dim until it became a matter of concern, and they were always trying to avoid what the doctors called "a complete break-down," though they never seemed to get quite out of reach of it.

How much of their altered manner of living was due to the League's influence and how much to her mother's health, Betsy had not been able to decide. Even when her mother, with a strange white look on her face, had told her that their money was almost gone and that all they had was the income from her writing and the tiny house up among the hills, which Great-aunt Sara had left them a short while ago—even then Betsy had not realized what it meant. Money had been counted such a little thing that it did not seem to be worth thinking about.

"Let's go live in the house," said Betsy. "We can be as True and Simple as we please there." She was a bit tired of the girls at the public school, you see.

"The air is very good, I hear," said her mother absently. "I think it would be a good thing."

But there had been Mr. Robert Gun, seventy-six years old and a tenant of the small house for ten of those years. They could not turn him out, could they? It was hard to wait, but they had to content themselves with the stuffy boarding-house, where Mrs. Hale went on trying to write and Betsy prayed every night that Mr. Gun might take a fancy to another house and move away. That month was a very long one to Betsy.

So it had gone until one sharp day in February brought the news that Mr. Robert Gun had moved indeed, having taken his place in the quiet churchyard and leaving the little house, with all his modest furnishings, clean and ready for the next comer. Betsy felt stricken with remorse for her prayers until her delight got the better of her. Her satisfaction grew when they heard that Mr. Gun, having no relatives, had bequeathed his worldly goods to the local Home Mission Society, who in turn offered the modest household gear at a very modest sum to the willing owners of the little house.

And so Betsy and her mother had found

themselves in a house of their own—a house tucked away on the edge of a tiny village and screened from the rest of the village houses by a wide up-sweep of field and a beechwood copse about the size of a tennis court. It was a low, two-storied, white-plastered house with green shutters and a white paling fence about its front garden. Betsy loved it the moment she laid eyes on it.

She liked everything about it. She liked the queer way it stood at the angle of the two roads, with the high-road in front and the winding, hilly red-shale road cutting across its garden and grass plots at the side, making a sharp angle at the corner. She was proud of its three kinds of walks—the neat gravel walk to the front door; the lovely, worn flag-stone path to the old grape arbor at the side, and the back-door boardwalk, with wide cracks in it that caught your toes if you stepped carelessly. She liked the four pine trees, too, that stood like sentinels along the palings by the highway. She was much uplifted over the tiny red barn beyond the scrap of a vegetable garden and she examined the harness hanging on big wooden pegs

against the whitewashed walls inside, as though she already had a prancing horse to put between the shafts of the red-wheeled buggy that stood there.

Mrs. Hale had been quite as pleased as Betsy, and Minnie, the maid they had brought from town with them, had been almost as much interested as they were, and the first couple of days passed gloriously for Betsy. Her mother did no writing and they strayed about the house, helping Minnie, who was all good-natured smiles. There was really very little to do in the way of house-cleaning, for Mr. Gun had left the place spotless, but they re-arranged furniture and changed the few prints that hung on the walls, and enjoyed the unusual work exceedingly.

Mrs. Hale had decided that neither of them should go exploring until all should be arranged within doors, and so their minds should be left entirely free for those first impressions of the village and country which, as a writer, she valued so highly. Betsy had been quite content, until on the fourth day, when the books were being unpacked, her mother had discovered a bulky bundle, which

Betsy knew by its aspect to be manuscript and which Mrs. Hale seized upon with an eager exclamation, and carried off to her room, where the sound of the typewriter began to be heard, clicking off the words with monotonous speed.

It was then that Minnie began to voice her desires for a movie show, as she called it, and to become more and more critical, while Betsy spent her time between the delights of their out-of-door possessions and the mysteries of Minnie's domain. She watched that capable person perform the tasks about the house until she was sure she could do them herself. No amount of persuasion, however, would induce Minnie to resign any of her duties, though she grumbled increasingly as the yearning for town delights grew upon her, and up to the very last minute she reigned supreme in her department.

"It's just a week and two days since she came," thought Betsy. "I hope the next one will stay longer. I can do lots of things, though, and Mother shan't be bothered a bit."

The kettle boiled over and she sprang to push it back, glancing out of the window at the

hilly back road where the sunset was flaming behind the bare trees. She gave a little cry as she saw a slight, wind-blown figure coming over the crest of the hill—a figure with fluttering skirts and a slow, light step.

“Why, there’s Mother now!” she cried. “I’ll have to rush——”

She seized a match and flew into the sitting-room, where the fire was ready laid, and she had it alight in a moment. She was deliciously excited. There were so many things to do all at once.

A sound like that of a subdued carpet beater caught her ear as she rose from the hearth rug, and she turned instantly. A dull hairy yellowish object was squirming abjectly under the shelter of the Morris chair.

“Why, Mac, you bad boy, you’re here, are you?” she cried reproachfully. “I thought you’d gone with Mother, like a good dog. You know you were bought just iggspressly to take care of us, and here you are, lying about under chairs by yourself.”

Mac was a recent purchase and Minnie had warned her against him as a particularly cross beast, but he looked so placid, as he lay

on his back with his paws waving that Betsy laughed and stooped to give the rough head a swift pat, as she hurried to the kitchen.

Mac, entirely satisfied with himself and seeming to be in a very good humor, careered after her, growing much excited as he saw the preparations for tea. He frisked about under her feet and barked at every movement which suggested food.

"Do keep out of the way, please," urged Betsy. "I'll have to put you out if you don't behave. You never acted this way with Minnie. You know you didn't."

Her rebukes were wasted on him, for he gave vent to his feelings very openly. He barked joyfully at the sight of the bread box and even went so far as to smell the tea caddy while Betsy was measuring out the tea as she had seen Minnie do it.

"I do believe you're hungry," she said, and the volley of barks that answered her proved that Mac understood her perfectly.

In spite of her haste, she poured some milk into a bowl and broke bread into it, carrying it outside to the shed, where she set it on the floor, and when he fell upon it with hungry

gulps, she went back to the kitchen well pleased. "I don't believe he's half as cross as Minnie said," she thought, as she hurried about, "and if I don't try to be too friendly all at once, he'll get to be quite nice in time." A glance from the window showed her mother pausing on the hill to watch the sunset. "And when she gets to looking at the sky and things, one never knows how long she'll stop," said Betsy, thankful for the respite.

Mrs. Hale must have lingered much on the way, for the toast was buttered and sizzling on its hot plate, the tray had been whisked into the sitting-room and put on a stool before the fire, which was roaring and crackling with a will; and Betsy had time to get to the front door before the gate creaked and footsteps fell on the neat gravel path.

She tugged at the stiff old lock and flung open the door.

Mrs. Hale, smiling and stepping slowly, with her dress and coat fluttering in the clean March wind and with her smart little hat all one side, was at the door-stone.

"Tea's all ready!" cried Betsy. "Come

into the sitting-room and get warm. There's a lovely fire and the toast's as brown as a berry!"

CHAPTER II

BETSY PROPOSES

“**W**HAT was it like? Did you see any nice people? You’re awfully late,” cried Betsy with her forget-me-not eyes shining and her cheeks flushed with hurry and expectation.

Her mother’s way of coming in, breathless and smiling, as from some delightful adventure, always went to Betsy’s head and made her feel that life was simply crowded with thrilling possibilities.

Mrs. Hale laughed a sweet tremulous laugh and kissed Betsy on the tip of her nose. “Toast and a roaring big fire? That’s good of Minnie, I’m sure,” she said brightly. “Did she do it of her own accord or did you put her up to it?”

She was small and delicately made and she had waving light hair and a mouth that crinkled easily; her blue eyes had an eager, appealing look, like the eyes of a small child,

which all her years at school and college had not been able to quench. She had a way of forgetting one topic and hurrying on to another, following the thoughts in her own mind, regardless of question or comment.

Betsy was so used to this that she hardly noticed that her questions were unanswered. She knew that her mother's recital would be all the better for the delay. So she set about serving tea, taking her post at the tray with great pride.

"Doesn't it look nice, Mother?" she asked. "I hope you're hungry. Will you have two lumps? The lemon's pretty strong today—being so thick, you know."

Mrs. Hale had turned away to pull off her coat. Her small beautiful hands fluttered up to her hat, found the pins and pulled them out. She flung the smart little hat with the plain coat on the carpet-covered lounge and ran her fingers across her eyes with a tired gesture, but when she faced Betsy she was radiant again.

"Two lumps and everything else you have. I'm simply ravenous," she answered, sinking into the Morris chair and curling up cosily.

She nodded at the tea tray. "Looks wonderfully good, I'm sure. Just the thing after a long walk in the wind. I'm sorry your lessons kept you home, though I warned you what would happen if you left your Latin verse till the end of the week. You're always slow on that, you know."

Betsy nodded, pouring the tea into her mother's cup with great care. She was glad that there had been no questions as to Minnie so far.

"Now I must tell you about the library—though it really isn't much of a place after all," began Mrs. Hale. "One could see how easily it might be improved by someone who had brains and experience——"

"Now, Mother," cried Betsy in alarm, dropping the sugar with a clatter. "You promised you wouldn't reform anything here. You said you would rest and keep quiet."

Mrs. Hale gave an amused laugh. "So I did, Betsy girl, so I did," she agreed cheerfully. "And I'll stick to it. I suppose," she added thoughtfully, "that I have quite enough to fill my days as it is."

Betsy thought of the bundle of manuscript

that had supplanted the regular writing, but she said nothing. She handed the tea and brought out the toast and cake, while her mother began to talk of all that she had seen in her long walk. Betsy had poured tea, when they had it, ever since they began the Simple Life, and although she had only lemon and hot water for herself she enjoyed the tea hour immensely.

"I don't mind missing this afternoon," she said, slipping the lumps into her cup and watching the bubbles. "I'd rather start in with church tomorrow morning. Besides, I can hear about the people you saw and then when I see them, I can tell if I can recognize them."

Mrs. Hale nodded. "First of all, then, comes Mrs. Worthington, who has asked you to go with her daughter, Selma, to the Friday Sewing Class. I accepted for you. What next—the library or the people?"

Betsy was delighted with this beginning. "Tell me about the people. I'm wild to hear about everything at once," she said. "All I've seen so far is two white men going to work and a colored man and woman cutting

the trees up on the edge of the big field. Nobody seems to go by while I'm looking."

Mrs. Hale plunged into a vivid description of the library and its patrons and Betsy could see the bare, ungracious room; the kind, incompetent librarian; the stout ruddy-faced women in tightly-fitted clothes; the thin, flat-chested ones in loose wraps and velvet turbans; the rows of worn books where Fiction triumphed over Travel and Biography, and all the other features of the scene.

Betsy forgot everything in her interest in the graphic picture. She let the lemonade grow cold in her cup and she ate her cake without tasting it. The pink note behind the clock faded from her mind as she listened to her mother's last words.

Betsy had been so interested, and she was so used to her mother's face, and the twilight grew so rapidly as they talked that she did not see how the shadows deepened, too, on the bright face opposite, or how the dark lines under the shining eyes deepened with fatigue. But when the fire flared up suddenly and she saw her mother's hands outstretched to the blaze, she cried out in amazement.

"Oh, Mother, your hands are just thin pink shells—I can see right through them:"

Mrs. Hale laughed and cuddled her hands in her lap as if to hide them. "Never mind my hands, dearie," she said gayly. "Everyone's hands look queer in the firelight. Tell me how you got along with your translations?"

Betsy, unconvinced, spread out her own fingers to the fire, but though they shone pink enough at the edges, they were not like her mother's hands. Once again she said nothing. Her blue eyes clouded and her enchanted hour was over. She remembered the pink note behind the clock and she almost found it in her heart to hate the missing Minnie.

Her mother seemed to read her thoughts.

"Where is Minnie?" she asked. "I haven't heard her since I came in."

Betsy knew the moment had come. She began to talk quickly.

"Oh, Mother dear, I got the tray all by myself and I made the tea, too. I can do all sorts of things until the other——"

Mrs. Hale broke in on her with the bewildered air she always had for household

things. "But what has that to do with it?" she asked. "Why did Minnie allow you to do her work? You were to make up your Latin verse."

"Oh, but I love housework, and you shan't be bothered a bit," cried Betsy. "Really, you won't have to stop writing a single instant——"

Mrs. Hale sat erect. "Betsy, what does all this devotion to housework mean?" she demanded. "Where is Minnie?"

As she half rose, Betsy put out an imploring hand.

"Oh, please don't," she said beseechingly. "Please don't mind, Minnie's gone!"

"Gone?" echoed Mrs. Hale blankly. "Gone? What do you mean?"

Betsy gulped over the disagreeable facts, but she told them swiftly.

"She was going out of the gate with her two suitcases when I saw her from my dormer window," she explained. "I called to her just as she slammed the gate, but she wouldn't stop. She shouted back that she had left a note for you and she went straight on. She took the three o'clock stage at the store."

"Well, well, so she's gone," said Mrs. Hale, dropping back into her chair with less displeasure than Betsy had looked for. "She left a note, you say? Do you know where it is?"

Betsy was so relieved at the way she was taking it that she forgot all her carefully prepared speeches about her own ability as a housekeeper, and she flew for the kitchen with hope rising gayly within her.

Mrs. Hale read the scrawled lines with an abstracted air.

"Hm-m-m. She says she gave me notice day before yesterday," she murmured. "I do seem to recall her talking about something that seemed to agitate her, but I was busy and I suppose I didn't pay much attention."

She dropped the note into her lap and gazed thoughtfully into the fire, while Betsy waited on pins and needles. She was not surprised that her mother should have neglected Minnie's warning, for she knew how absorbing her writing always was to her, and this new bundle of papers had fairly swallowed her up since she had discovered it. She could see, by her mother's unusual earnestness,

that something important was to be said on the matter, however, and she waited with what patience she could muster.

At last Mrs. Hale came out of her reverie. She smiled and turned to Betsy. As the glancing firelight shone on her pretty thin face and wide, wistful eyes, Betsy's whole heart went out to her in love and admiration.

"This note simplifies matters for us, my dear," she said with a brave flutter of gayety in her sweet voice. "I have just found that we should have to dispense with her in a short time at any rate. I was thinking it all out as I came home. And this saves the bother of discharging her. I've never discharged anyone, and I'm not sure I could do it properly," she ended with a little laugh.

"Why—" began Betsy, when her mother interrupted her.

Her face was more serious now and she spoke in a low, reluctant tone, as though the confession were very distasteful to her.

"I haven't been able to sleep and I have had such strange pains in my head," she said hurriedly. "I thought I ought to see the doctor—I didn't want it to get worse, you

know. So I stopped in on my way home, and found him a very civil intelligent person—quite the sort of man one could have confidence in. He said a great many things which I didn't quite understand—nervous strain resulting in things with queer names that I had never heard of, and the long and short of it is, my dear, that I shall have to take a great deal of out-of-door exercise and eat and sleep all I can, or I shall have——”

“Oh, not a complete breakdown!” cried Betsy with all her castles tumbling about her ears. “Oh, Mother, not that!”

Mrs. Hale laughed her tremulous sweet laugh, but she did not deny it. “You see, we shan't be able to afford a maid, since I am to do less writing for a while. And so we shall have to give up the house and board somewhere in the neighborhood. The air is very good.”

“Give up the house?” cried Betsy, her face going white. “Why, we've just come here. We can't give up the house.”

Her mother looked at her sorrowfully. “I am afraid we will have to do many things we don't like, my dear,” she said gently.

"We shall have so very little money now that even in this tiny house a maid would be impossible. We can board in the village or on a farm and we shall be quite comfortable, I hope."

Betsy's eyes had been growing very intent, and as her mother finished, she sprang to her, catching both hands in an imploring grasp.

"I've been thinking dreadfully hard," she said breathlessly, "and I've a plan—if you'll only try it. Let's stay here. I'll do the work and you can write as much as the doctor lets you and be out of doors all you want. I can make fires and cook potatoes and broil steak and toast *anything*! I've watched Minnie hundreds of times. We've Mac to take care of us, and it ought to be terribly cheap to live in our own house and do our own work. Please, please think of it, Mother dearest, for I'd simply die if I had to leave here."

Betsy was not the sort which overflows easily, and her mother looked still more serious, though she frowned in a perplexed way, shaking her head doubtfully as she listened.

"It's too big an undertaking to go into a new business without any experience," she said slowly. "I couldn't allow you to take such a burden on yourself and I know nothing about such things. The work keeps on all the time, too. You can't put it away if you are tired, like writing can be put away. When you get one day's work done, you have to start in the next morning all over again. It's appalling to think of it."

Betsy was not to be discouraged. The daring idea had full possession of her. Tossing back her hair with fingers that trembled with eagerness, she made her plea with all the power she had.

"Oh, *do* try it—even for one tiny week!" she implored. "I'll do everything, so you won't get tired, and it won't be a bit of a burden to me. I'll just love it! I've learned lots of things from watching Minnie and there's a cook book in the table drawer. I'll study my lessons harder than ever, and I'll promise to be frightfully good and cheerful, no matter what happens. Why, think of it! We've been here only a week and two days, and it'll soon be spring, and, oh, I do

so ache to see apple trees in blossom and to hear the bees in the clover. What's the use of learning Latin verse if I can't see the real things on our own real place? I don't know a Sabine farm from an ash dump!"

"Betsy," said her mother in her quietest tone.

Betsy hung her head a moment, but her passionate desire for home-making was too new and too strong to be silenced. She used her last resource timidly, for it was part of a dear memory.

"F-father liked the country," she ventured, and then was silent, growing hot and cold between hope and fear.

Mrs. Hale sat with her chin in her hand. "I don't know—I don't know," she murmured over and over again. "I am very much perplexed. I don't get used to making decisions without your father."

She stirred uneasily in her chair and frowned as she went on. "It certainly would, be economical. We might get a woman to do the cleaning—I don't know.

"And then she fell silent for a long time, staring at the fire, while Betsy kept a tight

rein on herself. She was used to waiting while her mother thought things out. Thinking was an important occupation in a house where thoughts written on paper brought in most of the money. This was the hardest waiting that Betsy had ever known, but it came to an end at last.

Her mother sighed and spoke. "I suppose we might try it," she said, half reluctantly. "A week or so would do no harm. The exercise might benefit me, who knows? I can't get strong by writing. That's been proved. We will try it for a week, my dear."

Betsy was too much relieved to find speech at once, and Mrs. Hale's smile flashed at her suddenly. "Do you really think we can do it?" she asked gayly. "You'll have to teach me all you have learned and we'll have to bolt our doors to all the wonderful housekeepers of the village until we've practiced our arts in secret for ever so long."

Betsy could not laugh. Her feelings were too deep for that. She flung herself on her knees beside her mother and kissed the thin hands over and over again.

"I'll simply slave if we can only stay here,"

she promised. "I love it so here in this dear little, queer little house."

Mrs. Hale patted the brown head and said cheerfully, "We're really very poor, you know. I don't think you realize how little we have. We never went into those matters much, did we? I wasted lots of money after your father died. I wasn't used to managing affairs, you see. I wish now that I'd been more prudent. Those great encyclopedias and expensive reference books took a great deal of money." She broke off with a little laugh. "What's the use lamenting them, though? I might have put my money in a bank that failed. I'm really better off with my encyclopedias, after all."

Betsy was so aflame with zeal that she hardly heeded after the first words, for they had given her something very definite to think about.

"Let's begin to do without things right away," she suggested cheerfully. "We can do without oranges for breakfast and——"

"No, we can't," interposed her mother decisively. "We may have to do without a maid and we may be denied many luxuries

we'd like to have, but we aren't going to either starve ourselves or work ourselves to death. If we can't make this experiment happily and comfortably we need not make it at all—remember that, Betsy. We still have enough to board at some simple village house, and that is what we shall do if we find ourselves uncomfortable here."

Betsy felt crushed, for her mother's tone was final, but her spirits were too strong to suffer a long eclipse. The week or so mentioned as the limit of time for their experiment seemed very long to her, and she was sure that, with proper management, the comfortable and happy housekeeping required by her mother would easily be established in that time.

They set a while busy with their thoughts and then Betsy broke out:

"Let's make tea into supper," she suggested with considerable pride in the idea. "There's some cold ham and lettuce in the ice chest—they're easy to get. And I can bring in some bread and butter and jam. We'll make fresh tea right here, and it will be great fun."

Her mother gave in so readily that Betsy

went further and urged her to stay in the big chair while the preparations were going forward. Mrs. Hale was too tired to resist, and she sank back thankfully, while Betsy went off to rummage.

She brought the food gayly into the cosy circle of the sitting-room fire with Mac sedately at her heels. "Minnie did everything before she left," she announced as she set her burden on the tray. "She's filled the dining-room heater to the brim and brought in enough coal to last forever. And she baked a lot of these biscuit and made some fresh cake. Everything is in perfect order, too."

Mrs. Hale sat up, shaking back the fluff of wavy hair above her eyes. "How good it looks," she exclaimed. "I believe I'm actually hungry yet, in spite of barely having had my tea. This is like a sort of game. So entirely different from anything we have done that it makes one hungry."

"You'll like it better and better," prophesied Betsy happily. "Perhaps it will make you sleep better, too."

They had a merry meal, Mac slept on the hearth rug while they chatted over their

supper, and Mrs. Hale seemed to forget the clamoring manuscript up-stairs and threw herself into the new game with all her heart.

“Washing dishes is far more agreeable than I imagined it,” she confessed after they had made everything tidy again in the old kitchen and were shutting up the house before going to bed. “We’ve been a prodigiously long while about it tonight, but that was because there was so much to explore and understand. I believe, too, that cooking may be quite as interesting as any chemistry problem. I shall try it myself tomorrow.”

“But I’m to get breakfast,” Betsy reminded her. “You promised to stay up-stairs until I called. You promised, Mother, and——”

“What a lot of promises I seem to make to my small daughter,” laughed Mrs. Hale fastening the big extra bolt on the front door. “It’s a bad habit, I find, but I’ll keep my word. I’ll stay in my room till I hear you call, but it’s the last time, I warn you.”

Betsy kissed her good-night at the top of the stairs, and went on up to her dear dormer room, with a light heart and springing step.

The young moon was sending long, slanting

shafts of silver in at the low deep-silled windows, lighting the simple room with its lovely mysterious radiance. Betsy dropped on her knees and rested her elbows on the wide sill. She could see far down the highway where the white road wound between the hills but she liked better to drop her eyes to the sharp triangle beneath her window, where the sentinel pines stood guarding the old arbor and the palings showed white in the moonlight.

"It's all our own," she whispered exultantly. "All our very, very own. Oh, if we can only stay!"

In the silence she could hear the faint, thin strokes of the kitchen clock and she counted them in dismay.

"Ten o'clock!" she cried. "I'll never get awake in the morning at this rate!"

She hurried into Minnie's deserted room and got the alarm clock, wound and set it and put it on the window sill nearest her bed. She folded the dull brown linen frock carefully, for she was naturally neat, and she braided her thick hair tighter than usual, for she was thinking very hard. She had the

breakfast all planned before she unlaced the broad-toed shoes.

"I'm growing up dreadfully fast now," she thought. "Most of people don't begin to keep house till they're really very old."

As she slipped into bed after her earnest prayers were said, the alarm clock on her window sill ticked out the cheerful refrain.

"It's fun—it's fun—it's fun to keep house!"

Betsy dropped asleep with the words tapping on her brain and a satisfied smile on her lips.

CHAPTER III

A SATISFACTORY SUNDAY

WHEN Betsy awoke the next morning she did not recall at first what had happened. A misty idea that something agreeable was in the air came to her and she sat up with a start, blinking at the faint rosy light that shone from the east window.

"I'm to get breakfast," she remembered joyfully and she cast an anxious glance at the alarm clock which was ticking away lustily with its round face blushing pink in the hopeful sunrise light. "Thank goodness, I'm ahead of time," she added. "The alarm hasn't gone off yet."

She sprang out of bed, switched off the alarm, and then rushed to her dressing. The cold water brought the happy color to her cheeks—she had no time for a bath this morning—and she slipped into her clothes and went softly down-stairs. Everything

looked very dim and still and unnatural, and she hastened to push the heavy shutters wide to let in the comfortable daylight. She could see the pines nodding in the flood of golden sunshine.

“It’s going to be a lovely day,” she thought, taking a deep breath of the pure air. “How warm it is—almost like spring! Everything’s bound to go right on a day like this.”

She ran to shut up the fire as she had seen Minnie do, and she got fresh water for the kettle from the little green pump in the kitchen sink. And then she set the table, whistling softly to herself and planning a happy future.

She was so busy with her thoughts that she had not heard the footsteps outside, and the sudden hammering on the kitchen door made her jump.

“Hey there! Where’s the milk kettle?” shouted a voice at the crack of the door.

Betsy gasped. She had forgotten to hang the kettle on the palings as Minnie had done.

The door slammed before she could answer. She seized a tin from the closet and rushed out after the boy, who was making for the corner

of the grassy triangle. The milk wagon stood on the road near the point where it met the highway.

The boy did not turn at her call, but allowed her to catch up with him at the fence corner, when, without looking back, he caught the tin from her, leaped the palings and swung himself lightly on the back of his wagon. He was in short trousers, yet he seemed an important person.

"We want half of what we usually get," said Betsy firmly. She was prepared to argue with him, for it was her first economy, and she was proud of it.

The boy, however, did not seem affected by the change. He whistled as he plunged the dipper deep into the big brass-rimmed can, he clapped the lid on her kettle with a snap and he handed it back over the palings without a single word. He was turning away before he spoke.

"Hired girl's left, hasn't she?" he asked, showing that he could put two and two together for himself.

Betsy nodded. She was beginning to like his frank face and nice wavy hair. She might

have answered had not Mac sauntered out to join her, snapping at imaginary flies as he came. The boy's quick eyes caught him up.

"Dog any good?" he inquired, with the frown of a connoisseur.

Betsy resented the tone "Of course he is," she returned loftily. "He's a very good dog."

"Humph, he don't look like he's got much pedigree," criticised the expert. He bent over the fence and put a stubby hand on Mac's shaggy head, turning the keen hairy face up toward his own.

Mac did not move a muscle, but gazed sadly at him, lifting his upper lip in a long hissing sigh. Betsy knew what that meant and she was glad Mac had shown so much self-respect. The boy evidently knew, too, for he carelessly withdrew his hand from the yellow head.

"Well, I must be going," he said lightly. "Got a lot to do yet." At the wagon wheels he turned to nod at Mac. "He's a good one, all right. I bet he can chase cats, can't he?"

Mac's habit of chasing anything with fur on it was a source of anguish to Betsy and she hated to confess his ability in that line. The

boy eyed her intolerantly as she reluctantly admitted that Mac couldn't bear the sight of a cat.

"You're the real girly sort, aren't you," I love little kitty" and all that sort of stuff. You ain't no *dog* owner. You ought to let me have him a while. I'd train him right." He cocked his hat aggravatingly and stuck one foot on the wagon step ready to mount. "Better let me give old Sport a lesson in chasing rats," he teased.

Betsy despised him. She flushed hotly.

"His name isn't Sport," was the most crushing retort she could find. "It's MacCallum More because he came from Aryedale. We call him Mac for short."

The boy underwent the most astonishing change. He flung himself into the seat, sitting up very straight, and he whisked his cap into the semblance of a Highland bonnet.

"And is it the noble Argyle hi'sel'?" he asked with a Highland twist to his tongue. "Troth, he comes tae the richt place when he comes to the Wee Corner, as Maister Rabbie Gun used to ca' the bit housie yonder."

Betsy fairly stared. Here was someone quite worth while.

“Oh, was Mr. Gun a Scotchman?” she cried. “And did he call this place that lovely Scotchy name? Tell me again, please.”

He rolled it out with great unction, enjoying her admiration of him and it. “The Wee Bit Corner of the Brae—that was what he named it,” he assured her in plain English. “He called it the Wee Corner for short.”

“Oh, how sweet,” she began, and then sudden misgiving took her. “You aren’t just pretending?” she flashed. “That would be horridly mean!”

He showed her such an indignant face that she knew she could believe him.

“Everybody knows Mr. Gun was Scotch,” he flung at her. “You ask anyone!”

And then he drove off with a clatter, not even glancing at her where she stood remorseful and ashamed of her doubts, carefully holding her milk kettle while MacCallum More sniffed at it suggestively. The boy was half-way up the long hill towards the west when Betsy stirred. She smiled as she looked about her. She had found a treasure. She looked at the dark pines, at the triangle of grass plot with its arbor and white palings and at

the nestling white house, all tucked away in the corner of the big, sweeping uplift of the wide field.

“The Wee Corner,” she repeated softly. “How sweet! It’s like getting a present to find such a dear name, all ready made for it.”

She went indoors, more pleased with everything and feeling capable of working wonders. The kettle was singing and the coffee was to be made, but even this problem did not dismay her, for she knew the cook book was in the table drawer and she relied on it with a serene faith that was not disappointed. Though the directions were puzzling, she managed it very well. Scrambled eggs and toast were easy enough after that, and as a special treat she opened a jar of the very best marmalade. And then she called her mother, feeling, oh, so grown up and important.

Mrs. Hale came down quickly, and when she saw the cheerful breakfast table and Betsy standing by the chair, ready to seat her, she gave a little pleased cry.

“How did you manage it, my dear?” she said admiringly. “I was quaking in my boots up-stairs for fear you had come to grief,

everything was so quiet down her, and everything's as well done as though we had any number of Minnies."

Betsy beamed at the praise, but was true to her character as cook. "Oh, please sit down, Mother," she begged. "The eggs will be cold." And when Mrs. Hale had taken her place and Betsy had slipped into her own chair, she kept an anxious eye on the coffee pot. "I'm not sure about the coffee," she admitted. "It was hard to make so little. The cook book expected one to make quarts."

"It's the best I ever had," declared Mrs. Hale warmly. "You'll have to show me how to make it, my dear."

Betsy's last fear fled and she gave herself up to enjoyment. She insisted on helping her mother plentifully and she really put on a few airs. She was very new to the business, you see.

"It's fun to keep house," she said with that quirk of her brown head that was so unanswerable, and her mother agreed heartily.

And it was fun to watch her mother, who wanted to banish her from the kitchen but who had to call her every other minute

to know where things were; it was fun to watch her after they had finished their meal, washing the dishes and tidying the kitchen, while Betsy emptied the ashes from the big dining-room heater, dusted the hearth, and laid a new fire in the sitting-room ready to light when needed. The sight of the color in her mother's cheeks made her cry out.

"Oh, Mother, you're a lovely pink like the sunrise this morning!" she said. "I'm glad we're going to church, for all the people can see how pretty you are!"

"Mercy on us" Mrs. Hale laughed, blushing very much. "You'll make me dreadfully conceited if you say such things. It's no way for the cook to be apeaking to me, either. I'll have to reduce your wages for impertinence."

Betsy laughed, too, and looked proudly at her. "There won't be anyone half so sweet as you in the whole church—see if there is!" she persisted, as she hurried off to get ready.

She was happier than she had been for a long time, and even the bed-making, which was a daily task, seemed different today. She put on her dark blue velvet Tam with

the red rose under its rim, and her blue velvet coat. Both were rather shabby, but she looked at them with satisfaction. Her forehead puckered as she surveyed herself critically in the old mirror over her bureau.

"I'll never be pretty like Mother," she said with a decided shake of her head. "If it weren't for my velvets I'd be a poor enough sight. It's a mercy I haven't grown fast, or I'd have had to take to that everyday coat—it's big enough for two but I'm perfectly hideous in it. I shouldn't want people to hate me the first time I go to church."

She rubbed the velvet with a caressing hand as she went down to join her mother, and she kept patting it as though it were a talisman to make her find favor in the eyes of others, all the way to church, for she was at heart rather timid and this first contact with village life loomed large to her.

Their way to church did not lay through the village, for the little stone church was on the high road just over the brow of the hill and beyond the beechwood copse, so that Betsy had little chance of seeing much of the village that morning. She was quite content, how-

ever, for her mind was full of hope and expectation. There would be people there in the church, and people were the breath of Sally's nostrils—after her mother and her own day-dreams.

They went into the little vestibule with two or three other people who came up at the moment, and Betsy, after examining them closely, could not forbear an aside to her mother.

"They aren't a bit different, you see," she whispered. "They're just like other people—except their clothes."

Her mother did not answer, for she was leading the way to an unoccupied seat near the back of the church, and after that, of course, there could be no more comments. Betsy made good use of her eyes for the first moment, but she was abashed by the stare which met hers and she soon gave all her attention to the service. Everyone in the church seemed to be staring at her. It was very disappointing, when she had expected to do all the staring herself.

She listened gravely to the sermon, liking the minister's kind, serious face, and she

became so partial before the sermon had gone half-way that she was quite indignant with an old gentleman in a pepper-and-salt suit at the pew-end because she caught him nodding.

This took her attention from the minister and she was soon glancing about her with eager interest, for she found that all the people were now intent on the discourse and seemed to have forgotten to stare at the newcomers.

Sitting decorously two pews ahead she recognized her acquaintance of the morning, the milk boy. He had on a dark suit, a smooth white collar, and his dark hair shone with brushing. Betsy felt more at home at once. She looked about with greater freedom. A fair-haired, placid girl in the opposite pew smiled at her, and Betsy smiled back, thinking, with a happy flush, that this must be Mrs. Worthington's daughter, who was to take her to the Friday Sewing Class.

After that she found the service very short, and when Mrs. Hale led the way out of the pew at the close of the session, Betsy had forgotten the milk boy in her interest in the girl, who was behind her in the crowded main

aisle. He seemed to have forgotten her existence, as he stalked past her in the coolest fashion, not even glancing at her, and stopped to shake hands with the minister at the door—a proceeding that made Betsy shake her head impatiently. Though she had forgotten him for the moment, she was not prepared to be completely ignored.

“Do you know Philip Meade?” asked a soft voice.

Betsy turned to see the fair, placid girl at her elbow. She spoke in a shy, gentle tone, as if she were a little diffident, though she was really always at her ease. She did not wait for an answer, as they moved with the others toward the door. “Mother says I’m to bring you to Sewing Class,” she went on, in her soft tones. “You’ll have to bring something to sew, you know.”

“Oh, must I?” asked Betsy, with visions of disaster. “But I can’t make dresses. I’d better not come.”

The girl laughed gently. “We don’t make dresses till we’ve learned everything else,” she explained. “And then we make only gingham dresses for the poorhouse. We just

sew seams, and hem dishclothes and that sort thing."

"Oh, I'm so glad," said Betsy, much relieved. "I'd love to learn to sew, but I'd never want to make poorhouse dresses. I'd be so sorry for them."

"Sorry?" inquired the other with a puzzled expression. "Sorry—for just dresses?"

Betsy nodded. "To be shut up in a poorhouse, you know," she replied with sudden friendliness. "I'd hate to make things to end in unhappiness like that."

The other looked at her with a look of admiration on her pretty placid face. "You're pretty tender-hearted, aren't you?" she commented. "Feeling that way about just—*things*."

Betsy was not used to public mention of her heart and she blushed. "I don't know," she stammered, and then with relief, she added, "There's Mother looking for me. I'll have to hurry. Good-bye. I hope you'll come Friday."

She had passed the vestibule and was on the top step before the slower girl could halt her. "Don't forget to have some sewing," she

warned. "Mrs. Fox likes us to start on towels. Don't forget!"

Betsy nodded and then hurried off to join her mother at the gate. She was thinking, as she and her mother passed out of the church yard, what a dear the girl was, and she was eager to talk over the whole matter, the service, the minister and the people, with her mother according to their custom. But Mrs. Hale was very silent and her eyes had a far-away expression which Betsy knew of old.

"You're thinking about your writing, aren't you, Mother?" she asked.

Mrs. Hale smiled absently. "I'd rather you didn't talk, dearie," she answered gently, walking on so rapidly that Betsy had to hurry to keep up with her.

Betsy knew that was the end of any confidences on her part, and she adjusted herself to it with the ease of long practice.

"Mayn't I begin to get dinner while you get it in shape?" she asked. "You could get it started and then we'd have dinner together and do the dishes nice and sociable."

The suggestion was alluring to Mrs. Hale,

but she shook her head. "It is not fair to tax you so much all at once," she said firmly. "You will be tired——"

Betsy interrupted eagerly. "Indeed, I'm fearfully strong," she protested. "And I'd love to do it. Please let me, Mother. You know you'll forget what you want to write if you wait till after dinner."

This was so true that Mrs. Hale hesitated and Betsy, seeing her advantage, begged so hard that her mother finally consented. "But I will attend to the dishes while you go for a long walk in the sunshine," she said, as they reached their own gate. "You mustn't stay indoors a moment after you have eaten your dinner."

Betsy was quite satisfied with this arrangement and she flew up-stairs to take off her precious velvets in high good humor. She knew she could manage the dinner by herself and she intended to surprise her mother with her promptness.

It took her much longer, however, to get the meal than it had taken the experienced Minnie, but at last she had it on the table with the potatoes done to a turn and the

steak just as you would have it—in spite of a fall on the coals. With the dessert, which she set out on the side table, it made a very creditable meal for a beginner. She was astonished to hear the clock striking two as she went up to her mother's door.

“Mother won't mind, though,” she thought. “She's had that much more time to write. She'll be hungrier, too.”

It was a bitter disappointment to have her mother barely look up from the clicking machine and say in a tone which meant obedience without protest, “Go have your dinner, my dear. Leave something in the oven for me, and go out at once for your walk. Keep to the highway and be back before four.”

Then she went back to the clicking keys, and Betsy, with a sigh, went down-stairs to the uncongenial task of dining by herself, on the steak and potatoes, custard and cake she had prepared so gayly. It was a dull business after all her hopes, and she tried to vary it by eating them in layers, though she did not particularly relish them that way.

“I'd hate to be a hermit,” she thought, as she finished. “It takes the taste out of food to have to eat it by yourself.”

She put the soiled dishes in the sink and her mother's dinner in the oven, and then she put on her every-day coat and hat and started off, shutting up the reluctant Mac in the shed to secure his protection to her absent-minded mother.

"Mother'd never know if the house were carried off, so long as she was at the typewriter," she thought, with a fond smile for the weaknesses of her gifted mother. "Mac's a good watch dog, though, and no one can even come in the gate without he barks like mad."

She glanced up at her mother's windows as she went around the house, but as she had not expected to see anything, she was not disappointed. "She'll be through long before I get back, though," she consoled herself. "She never writes so very long now."

She shut the gate carefully after her, and then she gave herself up to the pleasures in store for her.

"I'll walk slowly through the village. I want to tell Mother every scrap I see. It's such fun to talk things over with her."

She turned her face toward the village and,

stepping lightly and eagerly, she began her walk.

She passed the beech grove and the church and the barn-like frame building with the multicolored signs advertising so many various cut-plug tobaccos that Betsy thought it a tobacco warehouse until she saw near the door a small board with the words "Knights of the Golden Cuckoo" painted in very black letters on it, and then she nodded, recalling that the minister had announced that the fair to be given for the benefit of the Aid Society would be held in the Lodge Hall. It took on a greater interest for her, and she looked at it as she walked slowly past.

"It's pretty big," she thought. "They must be going to have a large fair. I wonder if we will go?"

When she turned the corner by the cross-roads she found the long, rambling village street empty in the sunshine. There was absolutely no one in sight as she strolled along, trying to prolong her walk in hope of some one appearing.

"I wish I could go pull all the bells, just to see what sort of people live in the houses,"

she said rebelliously. "I never saw such a quiet place in all my life."

She tried to imagine what the inmates of the comfortable houses were like, judging from the houses themselves. But it was dull work, piecing them out by herself, and she soon gave it up and passed the white house beyond the store, where she was sure Worthingtons lived, without lingering for a longer look at its shining windows and wide porches.

The wind was rising as she came out on the open road, and the water in the brook beneath the bridge was ruffled into tiny waves. It was growing cold, too, so instead of stopping to watch the whirling water, Betsy went briskly on till she gained the next hill.

The wind blew harder here, and her hair whipped about her face so that she had to walk backward most of the time. This was very entertaining, since it gave a spice of adventure to her rather prosy walk. You never know what may happen to you when you are walking backward, with your eyes more or less filled with long brown hair.

"I might step into a puddle like Dr. Foster," she thought, beginning to enjoy

herself greatly. "Or I might walk off a precipice and be picked up from the rocks a thousand feet below, mangled and——"

Bang!

A genuine Irish squeal rent the air. Betsy had bumped into something with all her force and was staggering from the shock.

Her heart stood still as she heard the shriek and she whisked about with her hair quite blinding her, and, clutching at the object that was tottering from her assault, she cried out remorsefully: "Oh, I'm so sorry! It was the wind in my hair. I didn't mean——"

And then the fickle wind whipped the strands of hair from her eyes, and she saw that she was clutching a wicker baby-coach while a stout, red-faced Irish woman, who had evidently been stooping to her shoe-tie, laid a helping hand on the other side.

"Oh, I'm so sorry," she repeated, but the Irish woman was beaming on her.

"Indeed, then it's yerself that's the quick one," she said in a rich brogue. "And me that set on me shoe-string that I neglected the precious things entirely, with the wind

a-screamin' in the ears of me, and the shawl a-blowin' over the eyes of me. Sure, it's lucky you was nimble, for yourself it was that saved them."

"But I bumped into them," explained Betsy grateful for so much favor. "I was walking backward to get the hair out of my eyes—it's so blindy, you know—and I went *blang* into the coach."

"Never mind whose fault it was, machree," returned her new friend, amiably. "It was breakable freight fer me to be a-leavin' on this windy highway at all, at all, while I laced me good-for-nothin' shoe." Seeing that Betsy glanced rather curiously at the white cloth within the coach, she added with a broad smile: "I do be a-takin' them to Mr. Dodson at the *ho-tel*, fer his christenin' party tonight, and mighty fine pies they are, savin' the baker of them—which is me."

"Pies?" broke in Betsy with a light shining in her eyes. "Did you make them? Can you make bread? Good bread—not the wet, lumpy sort?"

"Sure I can that," returned the woman proudly. "There ain't a fitter loaf to be

found in four counties than these two hands can make, as Mrs. Dodson will be tellin' ye anny day ye ask her. Is it bread ye want?"

Betsy flushed. She had not meant to appear as a buyer.

"Oh, no, I didn't want any bread just now," she said hurriedly. "I only thought perhaps you might teach me how to make it. We're keeping house, and I want to learn a lot all at once. And cook books are so confusing—'flavor to taste' and 'moderate oven' and all that——"

"Do you mean to tell me," interrupted the pie-maker with an amazed look, "that a mere babby like you is goin' in fer cookery? You ain't kiddin' me? Honest?"

Betsy was most emphatic. "Indeed and indeed I want to learn," she protested. "Mother and I are going to keep house, and I want to surprise her. Would you charge very much to teach me how to make bread?" She looked anxiously at the woman.

"Teach you I will, and no mistake!" cried the owner of the wicker coach. "'Tis the blessed angels' own wurk to learn a gur-rl in the ways of a house. Do you wait fer me

here till I've got shut of me pies, and then if you'll be steppin' with me to that there abode," nodding to a neat little house nearby, "I'll be a-settin' me bread for the morn's bakin' in about tin minutes, aistern time, and you're as welcome as the winds to larn it."

This was so much better than Betsy could have hoped that she was only too thankful to wait, walking up and down on the windy highway till the woman appeared with the empty carriage. Betsy dropped into step as she toiled up the rough little lane that led to her cottage, and though their pace was slow, their friendship grew amazingly.

Mrs. Delaney, with the delicacy that the poor often show, asked no questions, but she poured out a flood of information as to cookery and her own capacities as a cook and a wife and mother that was very illuminating. Betsy learned she had a son Jimmy at the public school in the village.

"A fair lad fer his books, when ye can lure him to them," declared his mother, shaking her head. "A grand scholard, but mischeevius, and always playin' the truant. It's l'yer I'm hopin' to make him some fine day, if he'll but stick to his books."

Betsy understood and approved. "A lawyer can be a judge, too, if he's very clever," she ventured.

"Ah, it's a fine perfession," Mrs. Delaney pronounced. "A l'yer is a fine man. No tools required, neither—nawthin' but a bit of an office and some thrifin' pens and paper betimes."

She seemed less hopeful about Mr. Delaney, though Betsy got a sort of religious flavor from her description of him. "He's as the Lord made him—the man," said his wife piously. "As the good Lord made him, now workin' a spell and now restin' his rheumatiz. But here we are at the door-stone, and it's welcome you must be. Come in by and shut the door from the wind, for it's cruel nippin', and the bread will take the warmer water by that same token."

Betsy did not understand these last words until the flour and yeast and other ingredients for setting the sponge were set out on Mrs. Delaney's clean table, and the mixing process began.

"You see, machree, if the weather's a bit nippy, ye make the water warm," explained

the teacher. "The colder the weather, the warmer ye put it in, or the dough won't rise none fer you. There now, the salt and the yeast's in and the stuff's mixed and done fer. I'll put a clean cloth over it, and set it by the fire—but not too close—and in the morn's morn it'll be ready to be nedd out and set to rise again ferninst the bakin'."

Betsy was disappointed to find it so simple a problem. "Why, I could to that myself," she said. "That isn't hard to do."

"Could ye now?" inquired Mrs. Delaney with the easy admiration of the good-natured Irish. "And then its meself as will lend ye the loan of some yeast and ye can be tryin' it. Set yer sponge this night as ye've seen me do, and come over the morn fer the rest of yer lesson."

She measured out a cupful of the foamy yeast, covered it with a tight tin lid, and Betsy, concealing it carefully in her deep pocket, walked sedately off down the rough lane, waving a friendly farewell at the turn of the road.

"I've begun," she exulted. "I've begun sooner than I thought I could. Oh, what fun it is to keep house!"

She got in with her treasure unseen, for her mother, exhausted and happy, was finishing the last morsel of her belated dinner in the dining-room and Betsy had a chance to slip the small cup into the closet before she went in to have the promised talk. She hoped her mother would not be too curious, for she felt that her visit to the Delaneys must be a secret until that delightful moment when she could hand her a loaf of perfect bread, saying carelessly, "This is my last baking—I wish you would try it."

Mrs. Hale, however, was full of another subject. She had been looking through the window as she ate, and she had found the old grape arbor full of delightful possibilities. "If we stay here, my dear, and if my—that is, if anything happens to bring us in a lot of money, I shall have that nice old arbor renovated. With seats and a rough table in it, it would be an ideal spot for breakfast on a summer morning."

Betsy easily dropped into this sort of planning, and they went out together, in spite of the nipping wind, and measured and planned, quite as though they were to have the work

done tomorrow. Altogether they passed a pleasant evening, what with getting a light supper and making the house neat and trim again before going to bed. Mac disappeared just before they were ready to go up-stairs, and Betsy, remembering the bread making, eagerly urged her mother to allow her to wait for him.

"He'll be here in a minute," she declared. "He always comes in by this time."

Mrs. Hale, who was very tired, made a compromise. "I'll go up and get out our fresh things, and if he's not in by that time, I'll come down again," she said, and Betsy had to be content with this brief respite.

How she flew to the kitchen! She got out the materials with shaking fingers, seized the yeast from its hiding place, and with an anxious glance at the kitchen thermometer, which Mr. Gun had left, she took the kettle from the stove.

"The colder the weather, the warmer the water," she said. "Well, it's getting colder all the time. I'll make it good and hot, so there'll be no mistake."

She poured the almost boiling water into

the flour, and was rather disturbed by the queer, translucent look of the dough. She had no time to spend in idle speculation, though, for Mac was whining at the door, and she could hear her mother's step on the stair. Hastily wrapping a cloth about the pan, she stood it on the shelf above the stove, and, flying to the door, she brought the dog into the house, blowing out the light as she hurried him through the kitchen.

She had him on his bed in the lower hall and was snapping his chain when her mother reached the landing. "It's all right, Mother," she said hastily. "I've put out the lights and you don't need to come down."

She was very thankful that she had made her escape, and she went up to her room, thinking of nothing save the venture she was embarked on.

"I don't care if I didn't see a soul," she said, thinking of her walk. "I'd be willing to be a perfect hermit if I can learn to keep house before the time is up. I wish it were morning. I'm so crazy to see my bread dough that I can hardly wait!"

CHAPTER IV

THE COFFEE MAN

ALTHOUGH it was Mrs. Hale's turn to get breakfast, Betsy was down a full half hour before her. She hurried through the darkened rooms, not stopping to open the shutters nor to release Mac from his chain, so eager was she to see how her bread had come on.

"I do hope it hasn't raised so high it's running over the pan," she thought, as she hurried through the dining-room. "Mother'd be sure to see it then and I want to surprise her."

The kitchen was rather dark, and she glanced anxiously toward the stove, but though the white-wrapped bundle on the shelf looked very large and puffy to her excited eyes, she could see even by that dim light that the dough had not run over.

"Thank goodness, it's stayed inside the pan, anyway," she breathed in relief.

As she unwound the cloth and raised the lid, a blank look came on her face, and she stopped, peering closer.

"Oh, dear! It looks very queer," she said in dismay, staring at the sticky, jelly-like mass that lay in the bottom of the pan. "It looks very, very queer. I never thought it would look like that."

She felt instinctively that something was wrong, though she had never seen raised dough before. Tears rose hotly to her eyes, smarting sharply, but that good old New England blood—the gift from her father—came to her aid, and the spirit of the pioneers within her rose up in its might.

"It must have been too cool for it here," she said with a quirk of her head. "The kitchen is pretty cold when the fire's down. I'll keep it good and warm, and it's sure to come up. I'll wait till it's half-way to the top of the pan, and then I'll run over to Mrs. Delaney's and see what's to be done next."

Her lips were very firm as she replaced the lid, wound the cloth about the bowl and stooping, put it under the stove in a place where it could not be seen and yet could be very warm.

"There you'll stay till you come up good and high," she said emphatically. "There's to be no nonsense about it."

She marched about, opening the shutters, attending to the heater in the dining-room, even playing a bit with Mac when he was roused from his bed, but never a glance did she cast toward the spot under the stove where the bowl was. She had an unconfessed feeling that if it were snubbed good and hard it might come to terms the sooner.

The supply of coal was exhausted and she took the coal bucket to the shed, hoping to have it filled and the stove replenished before her mother came down. Though the bucket was many sizes too large for her, but she set her teeth and took up the handle, after she had filled it to the brim.

"Here, you drop that! I'll take it in for you," said a cheerful voice, and Betsy was good-naturedly pushed out of the way, as Philip Meade swung the heavy load with the ease of trained muscles.

He was almost out of sight in a big blue sweater and he grinned sociably as he caught the handle from her grasp. Betsy's pioneer

blood was up, however, and she was not to be dictated to so easily. She kept her grasp on the handle.

At the door, which was narrow, Betsy had to drop behind, and Philip stalked into the house, leaving the milk tin on the kitchen table, and, going into the dining-room as though familiar with the place, he filled the big heater with an easy sweep of the bucket, replaced the lids and went to the coal bin again. The next bucket he stood beside the kitchen stove.

"You haven't muscle enough for this sort of work," he said, patronizing her kindly. "You'll have to train if you're going in for it."

Betsy was instantly on the defensive. "I have plenty of muscle for any thing I want to do," she said loftily. "We aren't going to lug coal buckets about, though. We're going to have Jimmy Delaney do it for us." It was the only name she had at hand.

Philip whistled expressively. "You better keep your eye peeled, that's all," he warned her, with a compassion that was baffling to the outright Betsy.

At the shed door he halted. "Where's your father?" he asked, sociably.



"THERE!" HE BREATHED

Betsy was taken aback by the sudden question. He—died,” she faltered.

Philip flushed painfully, but all he said was, “Want to see a woodchuck hole?” and Betsy accepted his apology with equal brevity. She nodded eagerly.

“Come along and don’t gabble,” he warned, and he led the way across the road to the edge of the thicket, near some big rocks, where they noiselessly crouched as he pointed. “There!” he breathed.

Betsy saw only a fluffy lump of yellow-gray fur at the mouth of a hole, but she smiled as she looked, for she felt that the woodchuck was the visible emblem of a new friendship, and she thought happily, “He’s really going to be perfectly splendid.”

She did not care in the least when the furry ball rolled into the hole and was lost to sight. She had found something that was better than any woodchuck. She had found a friend.

After they had gone back to the road and he was scrambling into his wagon, she looked up to him with shining eyes. “I’ve a book with all those animals in it. I’ll loan it to you if you like.”

He accepted with hearty promptness that augured well for the future, and then drove clattering off.

"He's perfectly splendid," said Betsy, and she went gaily into the house.

It was not until after breakfast, when Mrs. Hale had gone up to her writing desk that she remembered the bread.

It was just the same sticky mass as ever.

Betsy stared at it a moment and then she acted. Snatching up her soft felt hat and struggling into her big coat, she tucked the bowl, which was not a large one, under her arm and marched out as fast as her legs could carry her. "I won't wait another instant for the silly thing," she breathed.

She hurried through the village and over the bridge and up the hill to the cottage, not looking to the right or left. She knocked and entered almost at the same moment, and she set the bundle before Mrs. Delaney, who was at her kneading board, and who took her coming as quite a matter of course, until she saw the bundle, when she opened her eyes as wide as nature allowed her.

“And pwhat’s this?” she asked. “You haven’t been and gone and done yer bakin’ this time o’day?”

Betsy for answer jerked the covers from her package, and disclosed, not the brown, warm loaf that Mrs. Delaney spoke of, but the limp soggy mass of unrisen dough. She set her lips as her new friend gave one look at the contents and then began to shake her head, chuckling in spite of herself.

“Ah, it’s the flour-paste ye’ve been a-makin’, like the paper-hanger men do use,” explained Mrs. Delaney, suppressing her mirth as best she could at the sight of Betsy’s stricken face. “Ye’ve put the boilin’ wather into it, machree, or I’m a sinner. It’s gran’ paste, but it’s niver mortal bread.”

Betsy stared speechless at the wretched mess. It was a great blow to find that it had been her own fault. She hated bread-making with sudden fervor, but the lump in her throat would not allow of speech.

Mrs. Delaney patted her shoulders soothingly. “Ah, and don’t take on about such a thriflin’ occurrence,” she said kindly. “It’s me own fault fer not introjuicin’ ye to the

facts of the case—which is these. Flour and warrum wather, and the risin', makes bread sponge. Flour and boilin' wather makes paste—risin' or no risin'. You'll remember that now."

Betsy gulped and then flung up her head bravely. It was her second defeat that morning, but she was not yet conquered.

"I'll never learn to make bread, thank you, Mrs. Delaney," she said firmly. "I'm very much obliged to you, but it's too—too—complicated. I shouldn't know how to fix the stove or anything. I'll stick to the easier things, I think."

Mrs. Delaney seemed genuinely disappointed, but she had to agree. She offered to teach Betsy anything else she wished to learn, and they parted very amiably, the more so that Betsy, as she was leaving, recalled the coal problem and secured a promise of Jimmy's services in that department, provided her mother desired him.

The clouds were dropping lower as Betsy left the cottage and the mist had begun to thicken into a chill drizzle as she came to the bridge. She stopped long enough, however,

to dump the contents of her bowl into the gray ruffled waters of the brook. She watched it splash into the current with a limp *flop!* and she nodded emphatically as she saw it sink.

"That's the end of *you*," she said, with some relief; and she tucked the empty bowl under her arm and hurried toward home, feeling that she had met and vanquished her disappointment.

There are days in every year that can defeat the strongest spirit. There are battlefields where, no matter how gallant is the defense, defeat is certain. Betsy found this to be one of those days, and all her battles became retreats. Everything went wrong. Mac had been missing since breakfast time and her mother took to her writing as soon as the morning work was done and Betsy had a lonely lunch, after an hour with lessons which would not come right. Her mother was abstracted and eager during the meal, and hardly replied to the few words that were spoken.

The rain which had begun as a drizzle came down in quiet steady fashion—no gusts of

wind, no flurry of large drops. Just plain rain. The earth grew water-soaked and dingier than ever. The sky was a level gray. The trees dripped and the pines waved their long arms disconsolately. The hills were hidden behind the mist. Nothing would ever be beautiful again, it seemed.

Betsy at her dormer window, listening to the steady tapping of the drops from the eaves felt her spirits sinking to the gray level of the day. Yesterday seemed ages back in the past. She was tired of books. She was hungry for action, for people, and the mist curtain shut out everything in its monotonous blank. She came to her last resort.

"I'll get Jemima," she said.

Rummaging in the depths of a packing box that stood back of a curtain in the corner under the eaves, she brought out an old faded doll, whose cheeks had long ago been kissed flat and whose face was seamed and worn with much loving. A very bald head and long baby dress proclaimed this treasure to be an infant, though its faded and spent look contrasted strangely with its dress.

Betsy's face brightened as she lifted it out.

Jemima had never failed her, and with the very touch of the yellowing baby dress there came new inspiration.

“I’ll make you a dress, Jemmy,” she said, recalling at the moment the Friday Sewing Class and its pleasures, and giving Jemima a tender kiss. “It’s been ages and ages since you had a new one, my dear, and you’ll like it tremendously, won’t you?”

It was one of Jemima’s chief charms that she always agreed most heartily to anything Betsy might suggest. She opened her eyes very wide as Betsy held her up straight to hear this piece of news, and Betsy heard her say quite plainly:

“Oh, indeed, I should like it perfectly tremendously! And you can make it so beautifully for me!”

This was very gratifying to Betsy, who had never attempted any sort of dress-making before, and she got out a piece of pink linen which had been left from one of her pretty dresses, in that long-ago time when they were not devoted to Truth and Simplicity; and with the ardor of the untried, she laid scissors to it, intending to cut out a fluffy,

ruffly dress of the most fetching kind for Jemima, who was now of an age to begin to enjoy the privileges of young ladyhood.

She never cut the pink cloth, though, for a loud knocking on the back door caught her ear just as she was about to slash her way into it. It was a knock that was meant to be heard, and yet it was not a rude or alarming knock. Betsy flung down her materials and skipped down-stairs, feeling that she would not be detained long.

Her mother's typewriter was going at full speed as she passed the door of her room, so she sped on to the kitchen, and opened the door at once.

A pleasant looking man with a very long thin nose and an order book in his gauntleted hand smiled at her briskly. Motor goggles added to his quaint cheerfulness. Betsy liked him at once.

"Good afternoon," he said with a sort of kindling look behind his goggles. "May I ask if you are supplied with coffee? We are introducing high-grade coffee at low-grade prices. Direct from manufactory to consumer. From our factory to you, by way of

our motor van, and no middleman's profits. Premiums of the best grade. Quality of all goods absolutely guaranteed. May I ask for a trial?"

Betsy was delighted with him. She had not supposed anyone could be so homely and so agreeable. She was glad that their stock of coffee really was quite low, so that she need not trouble her busy mother. She closed and bolted the door, though, while she got out the little black pocketbook; for her morning's experiences had made her more cautious than usual.

The coffee man smiled as she opened the door again. His amiable, long-nosed face was quite a pleasure to look at as he laid the small package on the table and closed his order book.

"I am glad to secure a customer," he told her with kindly frankness. "I am a newcomer in this neighborhood, and I hardly knew where to begin. Can you tell me where I should be likely to find other trade?"

"Oh," said Betsy, with instant sympathy. "We're newcomers, too. I hardly know anyone—not well enough for that, you know."

He was not disconcerted. He laid a little red book on the table as he turned to leave. "Our premium list," he explained with his nice smile. "You may like to look it over."

After he was gone Betsy pounced on it eagerly. She did not understand what it meant at first, and it was not until she had examined the lists and studied the two red checks which the coffee man had laid on her purchase that she realized what the check and the list were for.

Then her eyes grew round. "Why," she breathed, "I can get mother's birthday present that way. How sweet!"

It was too happy an idea to risk detection, so she caught up the book and checks and hurried up-stairs with them. She wanted leisure to study the fascinating list and to select her gift. How could she dream of all that the coffee man's brief visit that afternoon was to bring to her?

Jemima looked on with interest as she was shown delectable lemonade sets, and attractive berry dishes and she seemed to incline, as Betsy did, to the lemonade set as being serviceable all the year round.

“Besides, the berry dishes are china and I do so long for glass—sparkling, shiny glass,” explained Betsy. “We haven’t much glass, you know.”

Jemima settled the matter by falling head-foremost on the picture of the lemonade set. “Take it, by all means,” she agreed, which was most unselfish, considering that she never could hope to enjoy it herself.

That was enough for the loving Betsy.

“I’ll get the lemonade set or nothing,” she declared firmly.

Jemima sat up and smiled as Betsy turned from the alluring pictures to the back of the pamphlet where the price-lists were printed in severe black ink. Oh, misery! what an amount of checks those coffee people did want for their goods. One hundred red checks was the number that these extortioners demanded for that lemonade set.

Betsy groaned aloud, and Jemima fell back, closing her eyes. It was unsupportable.

“And we will only take about a pound a week,” wailed Betsy. “Fifty weeks is almost a *year*. Oh, Jemmy dear, we’ll have to give it up. Mother’s birthday is in May, you know.”

Jemima would have liked to suggest another gift, but Betsy was determined. "I won't give her any snippy sugar spoon, or cup and saucer," she said obstinately. "At least I won't look at them now. I'd hate them too hard ever to get over it, and if I do have to come down to them, I'd rather wait a bit. I'll try to hate the lemonade set, and then perhaps I'll learn to like the other."

She flung the pamphlet into the packing box, and she took up Jemima again, hugging her close and rocking back and forth on her heels as she knelt before the window. The adorable picture of the ravishing lemonade set was very visible to her, though the little book lay in the big packing box; and she was murmuring her longing and sorrow into Jemima's patient ear when a sound made her pause.

She grew rather cold at the finger-tips and toes when she saw it was her mother's light figure on the threshold. She had not told her mother of Jemima for over a year and she blushed to be found out like this.

"Betsy, my dear," began her mother, coming into the room. "I've been looking all

over for you—” and then she stopped as she caught sight of the battered Jemmy. A perplexed expression came to her face and then she smiled. “Ah, yes, I see,” she said, and her eyes had what Betsy called her “writing look,” “duties beyond your years have forced you back to the relaxations of early childhood. Yes. That is natural. The law of compensation—” Her voice died into murmurs, of which Betsy could catch the words, “The swing of the pendulum. Childish revivals,” and she knew that Mrs. Hale had almost forgotten her in the rush of thought that the little tableau had started in her active mind.

Betsy gripped Jemima hard, but she said no word as her mother, turning to smile at her, left the room. The click of the typewriter began as soon as she had reached her room, and Betsy knew that both herself and Jemmy were forgotten in the flow of ideas they had been the means of starting.

Betsy loved her mother with all her warm heart, and she was entirely convinced that, if she would explain her conference with Jemima to her mother, Mrs. Hale would

understand with swift sympathy; but she could not bring herself to the explanation, and the supposition that she, a big girl of almost fourteen and a housekeeper too, could be merely playing with dolls, hurt her strangely.

The disappointments of her day crowded on her. She had been stupid enough about the bread-making. And now she was acting the baby with an old doll.

She rose with set lips. "I'm sorry, Jemmy darling, but it's got to be," she said resolutely. She grew rather white, but she never faltered.

"I won't be a baby any more," she told Jemima with a catch in her voice. "I'm very old now, and I've got to learn to be grown-up."

When she laid Jemima in the wooden box which fitted her so well, she almost broke down, for as poor Jemmy closed her eyes and sank back on the white satin bed—Betsy's treasured hair-ribbon—her patient look went to Betsy's fond heart.

She sobbed a little as she went past the door where the typewriter clicked steadily on, and her eyes were so dim she could scarcely

find the kitchen shovel. She mastered herself as she opened the umbrella and it was with a very steady step that she bore the wooden box out between the dripping bare lilac bushes, along the boardwalk with the cracks in it, past the barn and vegetable garden. She halted near a clump of rugged old boxwood, and, putting down her burden, began to dig.

It was not that she loved Jemima less, but that she loved the Wee Corner more.

“For you see, Jemmy darling, if I kept you and talked to you now and then, I’d never quite grow up,” she explained as she took the last fond look. “And oh, Jemmy dear, I’ve just *got* to grow up!”

It was the memory of the prize she was struggling for—the hope of winning a real home, that kept her up after this. She knelt on the soggy sod for a whispered prayer, and although she could feel the mud squash through her stockings, she welcomed it as a tribute to her lost comrade.

“The squashier the better” she murmured through her tears. “You’ve been such a comfortable person, Jemima Hale.

And then, like King David of old, she dried her tears and set her face steadfastly toward her little world.

“I’ve just got to grow up,” she said, as she took up the umbrella. “It would be perfectly hideous to leave the Wee Corner when we’ve just found it.”

CHAPTER V

WHAT BETSY FOUND IN THE CISTERN

BETSY went back to the house with the rain tapping monotonously on her umbrella and a flat sense of emptiness in her heart.

"Life can hold no comfort for me now," she thought, with a deep sigh.

And then, as she carefully threaded her way along the rain-soaked boardwalk, avoiding the cracks with slow feet, she felt a beautiful spirit rising within her. It was the noble spirit of the martyr, who looks for nothing save trial and sacrifice. She quite overlooked the fact, as most of us do at such times, that her martyrdom was of her own making and that the world, which she was forgiving with such a fine Christian spirit, had given her of its poor best.

What was there for her to do? She was looking about in search of some service to be performed when her eye fell on the face of the

old clock and she was surprised to catch its comfortable voice in the old rhythm:

"It's fun—it's fun—it's fun to keep house."

That reminded her of her first tea-tray—was it only last Saturday?—and she set about her task resolutely. It took her less time than she could have thought—so much her two days of practice had done for her. And when she had completed her work of love, she looked with something like pride on the fruit of her labors. Life was not really so dull as it might have been.

"Jemima would like me to be happy," she thought, following the path of all times and ages. "It isn't that I'm forgetting her. I often left her alone in the big box for weeks and weeks."

Her face was rather sober, though, as she went to call her mother to tea. She had the sensation of having lost something useful and dependable, like a hand or a leg. She might hobble through the world to kingdoms of great splendor, but she would always hobble—that she knew. She amended her words. She said to herself as she knocked at the door where the steady clicking was still going on, "Life can never be the same to me."

Mrs. Hale came out at her summons, leaving sheets scattered over floor and table and a perfect sheaf of clean, typewritten pages stacked on one corner of her wide window sill. She seemed glad to hear that there was tea, and she came down with Betsy rather more quietly than usual.

Betsy thought it was the matter of the doll until she had a good look at her, and then she knew that her mother had forgotten the little episode as completely as if it had never been. The ideas it had suggested had wiped it clean from her mind. Which was as Betsy would have it.

Tea was very pleasant. Mrs. Hale revived under the warmth and comfort and she was very nice about Jimmy Delaney and entirely agreed with Betsy that he must be sent for before tomorrow morning. It was decided to ask Mrs. Delaney to secure the services of a washerwoman for them, and various small household matters were discussed at length. Altogether it was a happier hour than could have been expected, and Betsy was starting off on her errand to Delaney's in a subdued, contented mind, when

an exclamation from her mother, who was beginning to wash up the tea things, halted her with one arm half in her coat.

"It's broken, I think," Mrs. Hale said, in a perplexed way, looking reproachfully at the little green pump in the sink. "It won't give out a drop of water, its handle is so queer and limp."

Betsy tested it with the air of an expert, but the handle clanked up and down in a very curious manner and no water would come, though she worked furiously. Then Mrs. Hale tried her hand again. It was hard to realize that water could not be got from the spout. "It's always worked all right," argued Betsy, puckering her brows. "We've done nothing to it."

Her mother looked more perplexed. "Perhaps I may have injured it without knowing it," she suggested. "I am rather absent-minded at times, I am sure."

It did no good to argue about it, though, for the pump was plainly useless in its present state, and so, while Betsy went her errand to the cottage, Mrs. Hale went in search of expert help. The two umbrellas bobbed

together as far as the store and there they parted. Mrs. Hale felt sure the store-keeper, who was a very civil man, could tell her what to do.

Betsy did her errand at the Delaney's with more despatch than she had at first intended, and she hurried home just as her mother, followed by a man in a faded overcoat with bulging pockets and a dingy felt hat low over his eyes, turned into the gate.

She caught up to them at the back door and saw that the tramp, when he was divested of his overcoat and huge goloshes—his hat remained firmly planted in its place—was not so bad after all. He had wiry side whiskers and a prominent Adam's apple which slid up and down while he talked and which fascinated Betsy so completely that she hardly heard her mother's explanation that this was Mr. Eleazer Simpson, the carpenter, who had been in the store when she had described the catastrophe of the pump, and who had kindly walked over to inspect and pronounce judgment.

"To oblige," remarked Mr. Simpson, with a sliding of the Adam's apple that was remark-

able. "It ain't in my line, of course, but to oblige a neighbor."

After examining the pump, peering about at the pipes which went into the cistern beneath the kitchen floor, and going outside for a look at the outside pipes from the roof, he delivered his verdict.

"Water's give out," he said. "Pipes to the roof leak like thunder. Can't send no rain into the cistern."

He demonstrated the emptiness of the cistern by unscrewing a patch in the floor and lowering a candle tied to a string, showed them a dark, damp vault with a glimmer of black water at the bottom, a fearsome sight to Betsy who wondered how she could have trod the floor so many times in safety with this lurking danger beneath. Mr. Simpson almost laughed at her fears.

"Ain't no danger of fallin' in, 'less the trap's up, and it's always down good and tight." He screwed the bolts into place to illustrate. "A elyphant could dance a jig on that there floor now," he concluded triumphantly, rising to face Mrs. Hale seriously again.

"I tell you what it is, Mrs.," he said reflectively, rubbing his whiskers. "It ain't in my line, but the rain's put me off my job for a day or so. I'll see that Jim North tends to the pipes—he's blamed hard to get, but I'll manage him. He'll come soon's as it stops rainin'. Meanwhile I'll clean out that there cistern, and when your spring rains come in earnest, they'll go in good *and* clean."

Mrs. Hale was nost grateful, but he waved her off with a tolerant gesture. Her ignorance of cisterns and pumps had placed her too far beneath him for argument. "It ain't in my line," he repeated, as he put on his belongings in the shed, "but to oblige——"

Betsy looked at her mother. "Oh, don't you hope the rain stops?" she said with a flutter of expectancy. "I've never seen a cistern cleaned before. Suppose we should find some buried treasure in it!"

Her mother shared her hopes in regard to the rain, though she did not seem so sanguine as to the hidden contents of the large tank, and they both looked out with interest the next morning when each opened her eyes in their separate rooms.

"It's going to clear!" called Betsy down the narrow stair.

There was a tapping and then the scraping of a ladder against the side of the house, a sound of men's voices that proclaimed Mr. Simpson a man of his word. The tinsmith was pulling down the dilapidated pipes and there was a business-like litter about the back door and in the shed when Betsy followed her mother through the kitchen to open the door for Mr. Simpson.

"He's here," Mr. Simpson, said with a jerk of his head toward the roof. "Pipes is all wore out, but we'll fix 'em."

Mr. North had the dilapidated pipes down in a surprisingly short time, and had trotted off to his shop in the village to construct new ones, before Jimmy Delaney arrived for his duties with the coal hods. Mr. Simpson was on the ladder in the cistern by that time, and he annexed Jimmy to help bail out some of the water at the bottom of the tank, and Betsy, recalling Philip Meade's words, kept such a close watch on Jimmy that he presently grew uneasy and left half an hour before school time, vowing that he'd be late and then what 'ud happen?

Betsy breathed a sigh of relief when he was gone. It was a great care to have him about. She sat down on her knees at the edge of the cistern and stared down, fascinated by the sight. The lantern which was hung to a nail at the flooring, cast weird shadows on the darkened walls of the tank. Mr. Simpson's hat and whiskers loomed prodigiously in the gloom. He had a cloth and a scrubbing brush and was carefully scrubbing the walls from the top downward. The cistern was hard to cleanse and it was a long time before he went down another rung of the ladder. Betsy found it very exciting.

He was on the third rung and her mother's typewriter had begun to click when she put the question:

"Have you ever found anything, any treasure, in cisterns?" she asked with some misgivings.

He swallowed dryly. "Ain't apt to," he answered. "The pipes as feeds 'em comes from the roofs and there ain't much treasure lyin' about loose up there, I'll warrant."

"Couldn't it be dropped in, though?" persisted Betsy, unable to relinquish the idea.

“By mistake, you know. Or to hide it, and then be forgotten. It might happen that way, I think.”

Mr. Simpson turned his faded eyes upon her. “If there is any, I never found it,” he said briefly. “Rabbits and field mice, now. They’re good and plenty.”

Betsy was abashed by his manner and she kept still for a long time, though she could not bring herself to leave. Her silence seemed to prove acceptable to Mr. Simpson. He began to talk of his own accord.

He told of his own cistern, and how Emma Clara had helped bail all one morning, “like a Troshum,” he said, but Betsy understood that he meant Trojan. It was all one, since it was of Emma Clara that Mr. Simpson wanted to talk. Never was such a girl, it seemed. Could cook, and so happy-spirited, too. Just like her mother, only Emma Clara had light hair and the Missis had been reddish-like.

“Was she at church?” asked Betsy politely, and when he shook his head she added hopefully, “Perhaps Mother saw her at the library. I’ll have to ask her if she remembers her.”

Mr. Simpson shook his head again, but more gloomily this time. "She don't go to the liberry," he replied, scrubbing very hard. The dimness and isolation of the cistern made him quite confidential. "She can't be got to the liberry, Emma Clara can't. No, sir. Give her a book to read and she'll whiz through it like a circklar saw through a popple twig; *but* ask her to go for a book to the liberry, and there you are—she won't budge."

Betsy was too much interested to note how the shadow of his whiskers trembled on the wall. "What makes her that way?" she demanded.

Mr. Simpson wrung his cloth vindictively. "I ain't so clear myself," he confessed. "Can't never get her to say just bang out. Seems, though, that she made a mess of askin' for a book one day when she was a school gal, made 'em laugh, *she* says. All she'll tell me is that she ain't goin' to let 'em laugh at her, not for nothing. Says she'd go fast enough if she knew what books was the style. Emma Clara is awful strong on style," he ended with some pride.

Betsy thought over this before she spoke.

"I suppose she means that if she knew what authors wrote the best books she'd go and ask for them," she said, feeling rather puzzled nevertheless.

"Arthurs ain't what's troublin' her, I'll warrant," retorted Mr. Simpson contemptuously, "but you wouldn't understand if you *was* told. You're too smallish to know about liberry books."

Betsy opened her eyes at this disparagement. "Oh, but I do know a good deal about books!" she cried, warmly. "I've always read with Father and Mother, and they both wrote things, you know——"

Mr. Simpson interposed, with an effort to be pacific and agreeable. "Yes, yes, I'll warrant you're smart enough in your way," he said, tolerantly; "but you're young. You're young."

He continued to mutter this sentence as he went on with his work and Betsy was silent again. It was not until he had gone down two steps of the ladder that another idea came to her. She had been thinking of a great many things in the interval, but nothing that had

any connection with Mr. Simpson as a carpenter until she recalled the arbor in the triangle.

"Could you tell me how much two plain board seats and a plain board table for the grape arbor would cost?" she inquired abruptly. "It would have to be made very secretly—for a birthday, you know."

Mr. Simpson, in the turn of his head toward her, resumed the aspect of a carpenter which he had shed when he took to scrubbing. He rubbed his chin.

"The arbor in the garding?" he asked.

Betsy nodded.

"Hm-m," he meditated, looking more like a carpenter than ever. "Well, as far as I can say off-handed like, about two dollars and a half."

"Thank you," said Betsy in a small withered voice. "I am very glad to know."

The wild hope that had sprung up within her died as swiftly as it had grown. She continued to sit on the floor in a bunch until her mother called her to her lessons and Mr. Simpson worked on alone.

During the interval of dinner she wished

many times that she had not been so sociable with the taciturn Mr. Simpson. "If I only hadn't asked him about the seats and table," she said over and over again to herself. "He'll think I want them—unless," she said with spirit, "he thinks I'm too young to know what I'm talking about."

Mr. Simpson, when he came back, went to his work silently. He seemed to be particularly thoughtful, though he swallowed a great deal when he looked at Betsy, who could not resist huddling down to watch him "for just ten minutes by the clock," she promised herself, though as a matter of fact, she stayed much longer. But that was Mr. Simpson's fault.

She had barely settled herself when he straightened up on his ladder—for he was now almost at the bottom—and opened the conversation.

"I was tellin' Emma Clara about them arthers you spoke of," he began, "and she seems to think you must know about 'em or you couldn't speak out that a-way about 'em. Emma Clara can see through a knot-hole, I can tell you! Yes, sir. And she says

to ask you if you'd put her on to 'em—on the sly like. She'd pay, or since you're wantin' them seats, we might make a dicker on it. She wouldn't mind your showin' her the trick, bein' you're so young and all that. But mum's the word, or it don't go."

Betsy almost slid into the cistern in her eagerness. "Oh, could you? Would you?" she cried. "Oh, how sweet! I'd love to do it. And I'd never, never tell. It would be my secret, too, you know. I shouldn't want Mother to guess."

Mr. Simpson turned to his scrubbing. "It's a bargain," he agreed. "You'll give my girl the tips on arthers, and when the time comes for your birthday surprise, I'll whip up the lumber in two winks. Nobody the wiser on either side."

And, having made his bargain, he became absorbed in his work.

Betsy rocked back and forth on her knees. "H—how much should I charge for the readings?" she asked timidly.

She was to learn that no villager will name a price for any consideration. Mr. Simpson stared and swallowed but could not help her.

"Oh, anything you think's right," he replied. "You know better'n I do."

Betsy had to manage it herself. "Would a quarter be all right?" she asked, ready to alter the charge if she saw any dissatisfaction.

Mr. Simpson seemed relieved. "Suits me O. K.," he responded cheerfully. "When'll you start?"

"Right away, if she is ready," replied Betsy. "I can go over this afternoon. She'll want to be ready for the library this week, won't she?"

This promptness pleased him. "That's the talk," he said heartily. "Emma Clara'll like that. 'The sooner the better,' was her very words. I live next the church, you know."

Betsy had not known, but it pleased her to find Emma Clara so near, and she promised to go there when she went for the afternoon mail, which came in at three o'clock.

She left Mr. Simpson to end his labors alone and she went out of doors to exult. "I'm going to teach," she thought proudly. "And that's the same as making money, for I'll get the seats and table for it. I'm getting on pretty fast, I think."

She felt so strong in her own abilities that she went out behind the boxbush and she dug up poor Jemima, wooden box and all, and carried her into the barn, meaning to smuggle her into the house when the coast was clear and to lay her away among the cobwebby bandboxes and chests of the tiny top loft.

"I'm growing up very fast, Jemmy dearest," she told her, refraining from the hug that she longed for. "I'm going to make money and be a regular housekeeper, too,——"

She stopped as a sound outside made her heart stand still. She had no wish to be found "playing with dolls" again. She slipped Jemima into the empty feed bin, leaving the box on the ground, and she ran from the place in quite a flurry, only to find that it had been Mac, nosing about the cracks of the door that had so startled her.

"But I won't take Jemmy out now," she thought, as she went back to the house, skipping a little for sheer excitement. "It's nearly three o'clock and I must go for the mail."

She ran up to tell her mother that she was going out, and stopping only to catch up a

small, fine edition of *Cranford* from the bookshelf and to tuck a popular list of a hundred best books inside its covers, she hurried off on her errands.

"I didn't exactly find any buried treasure in the cistern," she said with a little laugh as she shut the gate after her. "But I got something about as good. Two seats and a table are worth two whole dollars and a half."

As she passed the beechwood copse, she began to see another side of it.

"I wonder what Emma Clara will be like? If she's very hard to teach, I don't know how I'll manage," she thought, feeling, as Mr. Simpson had described her, very young indeed.

CHAPTER VI

NEW HORIZONS

THE neat house was pleasant to see, even in its March bareness. The winter-browned honeysuckle and well-clipped privet of its dooryard suggested thrift and promised beauty in their own season.

"I know I shall like her better than I thought," said Betsy, as she recalled the whiskers and goloshes of Emma Clara's parent. "Mr. Simpson said she wasn't like him, at any rate, though he's very nice, too."

She stepped on the neat porch and looked for a bell or a knocker, but she found instead something much more diverting. In the middle panel of the door there was a flat circle of iron with a thumb-screw in its center and an arrow on the iron edge, pointing the way the screw should turn. Betsy had never seen such a doorbell. She knew it at once for a doorbell, however, and she turned the

screw with a sense of pleasant expectancy. It seemed as though almost anything might come of it. She would not have been surprised had a genie appeared.

She heard the tinkling hum within and she smiled to find how different it was from what she had expected. "It's like an electric motor," she thought. "Perhaps Emma Clara is stylister than I expected."

The door was promptly opened by a bright-faced girl who was neither so old-fashioned as a genie nor so up-to-date as an electric brougham, though she was very agreeable to look at, in her pretty gingham house dress with her light hair coiled softly in her neck.

She did not wait for Betsy to speak.

"Come right in," she said, in a clear low voice. "You're right on time, ain't you?"

She had such a nice manner of speaking and she looked so self-possessed and agreeable that Betsy found it hard to believe she could be the prospective student. It was hard to fancy her hesitating before a librarian, particularly when it happened to be such a kindly, untrained librarian as the one as Mrs. Hale had described.

Emma Clara gave her no chance to doubt. She led her into the front room, which, in spite of chenille table covers and some agonizing prints of well-known pictures in bright gilt frames, was a very cozy place.

She put Betsy in the big rocker near the stove while she took the patent rocker by the window. All their best chairs seemed to be rockers.

"I'm glad you didn't bring a great large, immense book to start on," she said cheerfully, glancing at the small "Cranford" in Betsy's hands. "Most of the books are silly, or dry. So it'll be short—that's a mercy."

Betsy was rather abashed by this positive point of view, but she set to her task manfully. She tried to explain to the attentive Emma Clara the difference between what she hotly called "trash" and the books that were lasting possessions. She got rather involved, however, and as Emma Clara kept looking uneasily at the clock, she broke off abruptly from her explanations.

"I'd best read a while," she said, feeling that her task was a larger one than she had looked for. "You won't like this—it's only

a very quiet story. But it's short. And everybody ought to know about Cranford," and then opened the book and began to read.

When the clock struck four she paused. Emma Clara, coming back to realities, found her voice.

"Well, I declare if I knew how the time was going," she said in some surprise. "It's such easy-going work, hearing you read that way. It don't sound a bit like reading to me. That bit about Miss Barker's cow, now. That's natural as life."

Betsy's heart sank, until she realized that this was meant to be praise and then she glowed with relief. "Oh, do you really like it?" she cried. "Do you, honestly?"

Emma Clara looked thoughtful. "It's so dead easy, though," she explained slowly. "All the books the ministers gave me were awfully hard to read. Big words that I never heard of—books on pish-ology and di-lectics, whatever they are. I saw the di-lectic book in the manse and I thought it was a cook book. It sounded like diet, you know. So I asked for it. And after that he sent me a couple of others. They were stunners, I tell you."

The clock was beckoning Betsy, but she could not tear herself away. "Didn't you ever try anything else?" she questioned, wondering. "Isn't your father fond of reading?"

"Oh, he's great on the Highville *Intelligencer* and the Spears and Hobuc catalogues," replied Emma Clara, feeling that this was quite satisfactory for a man and a parent. "He's always going to that catalogue when he's extra time on his hands. Yes, he's a reader all right, but not just in the line I'm needing." Her glance strayed to a shelf over the organ. "Gladys Boggs, over at Greenville, always sends me a book for Christmas. She's crazy on reading. Always has a book around. Lots of lords and ladies and footmen in them, too. They're well enough at first, but you sort of sicken on them." They aren't much in my line. I'd as lief read a almanac. That's real, at any rate. That Cranford book's real, too, and it's easy—easier than a cook book even. If you could come over again before Saturday I'd be obliged."

Betsy had just agreed when there was a knock at the back door, and Betsy, not

wishing to be suspected, hurried off well enough pleased with her first effort.

"That's one whole quarter I've earned already," she said joyfully. "What a splendid start! I'll soon be regularly rich at this rate."

She was in such a triumphant mood that even when she met Selma Worthington by the store and learned that she was leaving the village for a long visit, she was not much dismayed. The Friday Sewing Class was of less importance to her now. She was genuinely sorry to say good-bye to Selma just as she had expected to know her better, but she accepted the postponement of their friendship with resignation, remembering Emma Clara and the desirable quarters.

"I'll be back for the Fair, of course," Selma told her. "We'll go together there, anyway."

Betsy agreed heartily and then, being later than she had promised, she hurried off, waving a farewell at the corner and trotting along briskly; for she was rather exact about keeping her word and she had told her mother she should be home at half-past four.

The little white house nestling in the angle of the roads looked very dear and desirable to her as she came pattering down the incline past the thicket. She was quite alone on the highway, so she could blow kisses to it quite as though it were a person.

"The Wee Corner," she said with a relish. "That's just what it is—a wee darling of a place. Oh, I'm so glad Philip told me its real name. We couldn't have made up one half so nice."

And thinking of Philip she found herself wishing that she might ask him some more questions about Mr. Gun. "I can't ask Jimmy Delaney anything," she thought impatiently. "He grins at everything and he's impudent to older people, too. I saw him make faces at Mr. Simpson behind his back. I wouldn't trust him. Philip was right about him. He's only a care and a burden."

She sighed as she looked forward to Jimmy's visits, and Philip's cheerful society took on attractions by force of contrast. She felt she must know all there was to be known about Mr. Robert Gun, Scotchman and friend of Philip. "He'll tell me a lot, I'm sure," she said hopefully.

Her mother was still in her room when Betsy entered the house, but the typewriter soon ceased to sound and Mrs. Hale came down to ordinary life again. Betsy found it very hard not to blurt out her secret.

All that evening and the next day, she had to watch herself very closely indeed. She managed it, though, and she was very proud of herself for such restraint. "I couldn't have done it if Mother weren't so very, very busy," she told herself as she waited for the rattle of the milk wagon the next morning. "I never knew her to work so much on that machine. I wonder why she never stops."

She forgot to wonder, as the wagon came up. Philip was not in it. A big good-natured man in a khaki gunning coat and stubbly beard ladled out the milk, offering no explanation and driving off without another word beyond a cheerful "Morning" when he came and a nod as he left. It was very disappointing, when she had been prepared to be sociable, to meet with a blank wall like this.

Perhaps that was why she remembered Jemima, who had been her rock in times past.

Mac frisked beside her, but she shut him out. The dim interior seemed darker than ever in contrast to the shining morning outside, where a brilliant new world was glistening in the warm sunshine. The buggy with its gray linen cover loomed larger than usual and the harness seemed to peer at her as she went to the feed bin. It was a lonely place for poor Jemima and Betsy hastened to her relief.

She raised the heavy lid with a struggle. It had taken only a crack to slip Jemima in, but it had to be opened wide before Betsy could reach her two hands into the dusty cavern to grope for her discarded favorite.

She gave a cry as she came upon her. "Oh, Jemmy!" she exclaimed. "Oh, my dear Jemima!"

The faithful friend was a crumbling ruin.

Her bran body was gone and her battered face looked out of a fringe of chewed and tattered pink muslin that had once been her flesh. The rats had been swift and thorough. It was a real tragedy.

Betsy felt the sting of remorse. She knew that Jemima would never have been parted

from her pink bran body but for her own carelessness. And she realized for the first time how lost, how entirely and completely lost, was the old relationship.

She kissed the poor face very tenderly, and she shed some tears as she tucked the dear head into the inside pocket of her big coat. "So as to be nearer my heart, Jemmy dearest," she whispered. And then, because she did not want to go outside to the glare of happy sunlight or to meet her mother who was coming down presently, and might be already getting breakfast, she pushed aside the linen covering and climbed into the red-wheeled buggy; thereby opening a new chapter of her experiences.

The buggy was very comfortable, but that was not what made the difference. Betsy had been used, long ago, to very comfortable automobiles. But a buggy was different. You at once began to think of long drives through shady lanes where roses bloomed and birds sang. You had never been in a buggy before, of course, but somehow you knew that this was what they were for. One took long, happy, rambling drives in them, and had all sorts of adventures.

Betsy sat for a while, with Jemima's head pressed against her heart. It was very pleasant, the sensation of driving which she got from sitting in the buggy gave such color to her thoughts.

A bark from Mac, who had returned and was impatient to be let in, roused her. She got down from the buggy. Her face was wistful and her eyes clear and wondering. She paused as she put the cover in place, and she gently pressed one hand caressingly on the lumpy place above her heart.

"Good-bye, Jemima dear, dearest," she whispered, and her whisper was all the more fervent that she knew she had grown beyond such consolations as had served her younger days. "Good-bye for really. I'm sorry, but——"

She did not know just what she was sorry for. She had a sense of having gone beyond many of her old ideas and occupations. It made her feel queer and yet strangely excited. She knew that she should never need Jemima again in exactly the way she used to need her. The world was growing very wide indeed.

CHAPTER VII

GREAT EXPECTATIONS

BETSY kept that sense of having left something behind her, and of having come into better things. A great many things happened to keep it strong and fresh for the next few days.

In the first place, she was very busy. Her mother was incessantly at her writing table now and Betsy was left to cope with the household matters as best she might for the rest of that remarkable week. She had her own lessons and all the errands to do, besides going for mail, and thinking and planning a good deal as to the course of reading that might best equip Miss Simpson for her encounters with the book-reading public. All this made her feel the pulse of the new life strongly.

It made her ambitious, too. For, having overcome one dragon, she began to pursue another.

No sooner was she assured, by the success of her first visit to the Simpson home, of the coveted seats and tables than she actually began to hanker after the unattainable lemonade set. The picture in the premium list tantalized her. She saw it before her whenever she thought of the arbor and the birthday treat, and she felt convinced that could she only secure the prospect of the lemonade set to place on the birthday table, she might look on the Wee Corner as her home for years. It seemed a talisman to work the magic that should keep them there.

She even told Miss Simpson of it on Thursday afternoon.

Their friendship had progressed rapidly, and it was while Emma Clara was wiping her eyes over brave Captain Brown's death—a scene that always brought Betsy's tears—that the secret desire of her heart was laid bare.

"I just can't help wanting it dreadfully," she said, "I sort of feel if I could manage it, that everything else would go beautifully." She had not told of their agreement in regard to the housekeeping test.

"You might get someone you know to take some of the coffee," suggested Emma Clara. "Lots of people never think of having the checks, you know. They don't even know about them."

Betsy knew this to be quite true in her own case, but she shook her head. "I don't know anyone," she returned. "Even if I did ask any of the village people I couldn't keep the checks. They're none of them very rich, and they'd like them for themselves."

It was a blockade, but Emma Clara surmounted it.

"There's Mrs. Bond out on the Highville road," she said thoughtfully. "She'll be here this year for a couple of months. She's got a gang of help and a whole parcel of company all the while she's here. She wouldn't care about the checks, I'll warrant."

Betsy knew nothing of Mrs. Bond.

Emma Clara explained: "She used to live right here in the village in that nice old house near the bridge. They were good people but awfully poor, and she did all sorts of things—tried to raise chickens, and everything. Then she married Mr. Bond, just as her mother died,

and she's been in clover ever since. She comes here about a month out of every year, just to make herself feel comfortable by seeing how far up she's gone, since she used to worry and scratch for the dollars on this very spot."

"She doesn't sound very nice," remarked Betsy with a frown.

"Oh, she's nice, all right," said Emma Clara, good naturedly. "She's a mighty good woman, though she does like to show herself. You can't blame her too much for that, either. It's dizzy-fying to be a millionaire, I guess. She's said to be right tenderhearted, if you get on the right side of her, though she's so sort of crusted over with grandness that you ain't apt to see it straight off."

They talked for a while about this fortunate lady, whose only misfortune seemed to be an ailing daughter.

Betsy could not make up her mind about this plan for securing the checks. It had its advantages, but it required courage. "I'll ask the coffee man if it would do," she finally decided and they left the matter there for the present.

The suggestion of such a plan, however, gave her the feeling of wide enterprise and business ability, and she walked home with her head held high.

The heavy languor of early spring was in the air. There was an odor abroad that was like no other odor in this changing world.

She felt the pulse of energy that would bring flowers and melody to the dull scene, and she heard an echo of it in her own heart. "I believe I can do it, if it's all right," she said, thinking of Mrs. Bond, and she smiled as she looked toward the upland where the farmer plowed, whistling; and her mind was filled with visions of the happy summer beyond the horizon. "I could do almost anything *now*," she told herself.

She lingered on the way until the sun was down. She found her mother looking out at the afterglow back of the trees on the hill with eyes that shone] and lips that trembled. Something must have occurred, she was certain and she gave a little eager start as her mother turned to her and spoke.

"I've finished it," Mrs. Hale said with a glad tremor in her voice. "Oh, Betsy, I've

finished it! And I'll send it off tomorrow. Of course, it will be weeks before we can hear about it——"

Betsy was so amazed by her mother's manner that she broke in. "Your writing, you mean?" she asked, relieved and yet puzzled by the intensity of the tone. "Are the publishers in a hurry for it? You never wrote so hard before, I think."

The shining eagerness was veiled by sudden anxiety. "They may be in a hurry for it, and—they may not," she replied breathlessly.

Her tone was so strange that Betsy caught her hand in alarm. "Oh, Mother, what do you mean?" she asked. "Do tell me. You are so—so strange that I'm all puzzled——"

Her mother drew a deep breath. "It's a book—a novel," she said rapidly. "I wrote it long ago, before your father died. I wrote it in scraps, and then I put it away and forgot it. When I saw it among the papers here, I found that it was better than I thought. I've been re-writing parts of it—the new environment gave me inspiration and strength. And now it's finished."

Betsy broke out as she paused. "Oh, Mother, how beautiful!" she cried, excited and wondering. "How could you ever manage to do it—a novel, a real novel! How lovely it'll be to have people asking at the libraries for Mrs. Hale's book. Oh, Mother!" And she kissed her ecstatically.

Mrs. Hale glowed and laughed and then grew sober. "It will be a long way to that happiness, Betsy dear," she said, with her childish look coming to her eyes. "They may not take it. I've spent all my time on it when I ought to have been doing other work, too. They may not take it."

"Not take it?" exclaimed Betsy indignantly. "Haven't you been writing nice reviews for ages and ages? Why shouldn't they take it?"

Her mother did not answer at once. She seemed to become suddenly very tired. "Don't let's talk about it any more now," she said gently. "We'll have long enough to wait, in any case. I have something more to tell you, too, that will please you, I am sure. I have been thinking a good deal about it, here in the twilight by myself. And I've

come to the conclusion that we will have to stay here for a month at least. I shall have to rest a while before I can get at my regular work. This has rather taken it out of me. And it is very inexpensive here."

Betsy hardly heard the reasons. She was so delighted with the fact that nothing else mattered just then. The future glowed rosy before her and she clasped her hands tightly as she cried, "A month? Why, that's plenty of time, I'll have learned so much and I'll have a chance to—" She caught herself in time, and added more soberly, "You'll love it so by that time you won't want to leave. I'm very, very glad, Mother dear."

Mrs. Hale rose. "That's disposed of, at all events," she said brightly. "Now, let's pitch into housekeeping. It's time to begin with supper."

Betsy's feeling of having left childish things behind was strong upon her the next day, as she laid the ruins of Jemima to rest forever in a small tin box in the topmost peak of the tiny loft above her room and she was conscious of that subdued sorrow which time has touched with his healing wing.

Her mind was full of memories of those earlier days when the then rosy cheeks of the smiling doll had been first kissed by her, and that, perhaps, was the reason she did not notice the nail. It caught her firmly by the skirt hem, at all events, and held her fast. Betsy stooped to release her dress and a pack of old pamphlets thrust away near the opening attracted her attention. She sat down to investigate.

"And the truth shall make you free," she read in large emphatic letters of the first headline.

It had been the text of the Sunday's sermon and Betsy had liked it then. She read on eagerly. The pamphlet was one of the League's first efforts and it was hot with energy. Betsy found it misty in places, but she managed to get a pretty fair idea of the blessed advantages set forth in it of telling and acting the truth on all occasions, in season and out of season—the whole truth and nothing but the truth.

At the end of an ardent half hour she dropped the book in her lap and her clear, steady, courageous eyes shone with a new

light. "It's beautiful," she breathed. "I don't wonder Mother loved it. Oh, it's just beautiful!"

She sat quite still for a while, thinking rapturously. She felt more grown-up than ever. She was aflame with the desire for regeneration. She would try to reform herself first, as the minister had fitly urged. Oh, she would try very hard, indeed. She knew she should be brave and merciless.

Down from the loft she went and began to practice her own reform in a characteristic fashion. The sword was in her unswerving hand—was it strange that some wounds should be dealt?

She stuck to the truth rigorously and in the minutest detail. It made her companionship a bit duller than usual, but her mother was too fatigued and absent to notice, or Betsy might have been spared remorse.

Betsy was the lone apostle. She sharpened her sword and tested its edge on her own words and actions. It was very keen and yet she hesitated. Her courage failed her when it came to the pinch.

She tried it on Jimmy Delaney first. He

laughed in her face when she painted a picture of the delights of absolute truthfulness. "Better see how it goes yerself," he retorted. "I heered you say as how you was tired to death yisterdee, and you're alive all-rightie this mornin'. You ought-a a-died, if you was so pertickeler."

Betsy had been rather uneasy about the grinning Jimmy from the first. She had doubted him when Mac refused his open overtures—Mac and Jimmy had met before on the roads—and she felt positive now that a boy who would not even pretend to like the truth, must be indeed a dark character.

She had great doubts, too, about the coffee plan until Monday morning when the coffee man made his punctual appearance. Mrs. Hale had gone for the mail and Betsy put her questions unmolested.

"Surely, surely, it would be all right in this case," he said, smiling at her with his eyes looking very bright through his big goggles, "If the other party agrees to it, we can't kick."

Betsy put the coffee away, tucked the two red checks into the secret box in her own

bureau and then slipped hurriedly over to the Simpson house. Emma Clara had offered to take her part of the way in her buggy, if the coffee man agreed to the plan.

She rang the twirling bell and faced Emma Clara with inward excitement, though she spoke quietly.

“He says it’s all right. We can go tomorrow, if you’re willing.”

CHAPTER VIII

BETSY MAKES A CALL

“**W**HAT a pity it’s too warm for my dear velvets,” sighed Betsy, looking at herself in the glass with some misgivings. “I’m not very inviting looking in every-day clothes. But I couldn’t let Mother suspect it was such a very special occasion.”

She was a plain little figure in her dull linen dress with her broad-toed shoes and soft felt hat. If it had not been for her erect carriage and the bright courage that looked out of her clear eyes, she might have been quite insignificant. Betsy’s forbears had been leaders in their day and they had left their legacy to this small, blue-eyed descendant.

Emma Clara Simpson, waiting for her in an old, well-scrubbed buggy, at the top of the hill beyond the beech grove, smiled as she greeted her. Emma Clara knew the real

thing when she saw it, in spite of her parent's whiskers and Adam's apple.

"It's a splendid day and everybody'll be in a good humor," she said, as Betsy climbed aboard. "You'll have luck, I'll warrant."

This was a pleasant beginning. And the drive was very pleasant, too. It was almost as Betsy had fancied it would be to ride in a buggy. Emma Clara, who had an eye for these things, pointed out a great many remarkable things to her.

Betsy was rather silent. Although the sense of the surging life of field and forest thrilled her strangely, she did not forget that she had serious business before her; and when Emma Clara brought the shambling horse to a standstill in a lane near a clump of carefully trimmed evergreens, her heart leaped up and then sank with a *flop!*

Emma Clara helped her out and then drew the light robes over her own knees. "Go right in that gateway on the pike," she said. "You'll have luck, I'll warrant." And then she drove away.

Betsy walked on mechanically.

As she went up the imposing sweep of drive-

way that led to the front of the wide-spreading, luxurious house, she felt a sudden sensation in her throat which was not at all reassuring. It was like choking, and it made her wish very much to go back.

"They have company, too," she thought, all in a flurry, noticing some limousines at the side. "Perhaps I'd better come another day."

Her feet stopped of their own accord for one tiny moment while she faced this disheartening picture.

Then she flung up her head still higher and her feet took up their work again. "I won't be a silly baby after coming all this way," she said, scornful of her own weakness. She was glad that she did not recall Emma Clara Simpson waiting in the buggy beyond the corner, until after she had gained her victory.

Her feet took her obediently to the great entrance, where big iron chains across the steps told her that she was not expected to enter there. Mrs. Bond did things magnificently, it seemed. Betsy recalled the limousines at the side entrance.

"I wonder if this is like going into the

kitchen by the back door, as they do in the village?" she thought, eyeing the small ornate doorway doubtfully. It had the aspect of a family affair.

Then she caught sight of a strip of red carpet and a correct automobile footman standing on the graveled sweep by the flat step, and her inherited self-command came to her rescue. She went forward toward the door, not showing that she was at all impressed by the liveried servant, though he did make her a bit uncomfortable. The small door opened from inside and she stepped into the house as quietly as though she had been there before.

Inside of the door, on the smooth green velvet carpet of the small hall, stood a tall young man, not dressed like the one outside, but in short trousers with blue garters about his knees and a tailed coat with striped collar and glittering buttons. Betsy wondered that he did not have powdered hair, like the English footmen in books, but she spoke to him with great self-possession.

"Is Mrs. Bond in?" she asked.

Her manner seemed to reassure the young

man, who had been eyeing her rather doubtfully.

"Yes, Miss, she is in the drawing-room," he replied, with great apparent respect. "Please come this way."

It was strange how easily this great lady could be reached. Betsy, even with her mind full of new impressions, wondered at it as she followed the tall footman through an elaborate and ornate hall, where another man in livery stood staring vacantly at the carved and gilded scroll-work of the ceiling. This man took his eyes from the ceiling long enough to glance at Betsy as the tall young man murmured something about "Miss Helen" and "orders to take her in at once," and then he went back to his comotose state, leaving matters take their own course.

The rooms which the tall young footman led Betsy through were elaborate enough for a palace. The brocaded walls, the great, gilt Georgian consoles, the cabinets of rare curios, and the wonderful carved furniture all spoke of a lavish love of display. Betsy remembered museums which had made her feel like this.

She was swiftly ushered into a great, low-

ceiled room which was even more luxurious than the others, and where, at the far end by a sunny window, a group of people were seated. The footman directed her toward this group with a polite bow, and then he vanished.

The group turned at her approach. There was a magnificent lady whom Betsy recognized from the description of Mrs. Bond. A young lady with very light hair and very pink cheeks; an older lady in blue who was smiling very much; and a blunt-featured young man in irreproachable clothes made up the rest of the party. Betsy, in her plain drab clothes, was a strong contrast to them.

Fortunately for herself, Betsy was not thinking of her own looks just then. She was very much more interested in the people who were looking at her. She selected Mrs. Bond for her special curtsy and she gave her quick little bobbing bows to the others in turn.

"Good afternoon," she said in her clear voice.

There was an amused murmur from the others, while Mrs. Bond, glancing sharply at her from her large bright eyes, answered in

that high musical tone which is the hall-mark of the social elect.

"Good afternoon," she returned, not unkindly. "You are quite early, are you not?"

Betsy flushed. "I am sorry. I didn't want to disturb you," she said, happily unconscious of the smiles that passed between the lady in blue and the sparkling young lady. "I really didn't expect to come in by that little door, like one of the family. They brought me right in, you see. Perhaps I should have asked the footman, but—" and her brow puckered a bit—"I thought that one shouldn't talk to footmen. You see," she explained, relaxing under the warmer look in Mrs. Bond's eyes. "I've really never seen a live footman in a house before, and I hardly knew what was expected."

Mrs. Bond's red lips parted in a gracious smile. "Well, you have arrived it seems, albeit a bit ahead of your hour," she said. "Miss Helen will be ready to see you, however, and Jacobs will take you to her at once. It was a mere matter of form to send you here. You'll do very nicely, I am sure."

She was putting out her hand toward an

electric button nearby when Betsy's exclamation arrested her.

"Oh," said Betsy, who understoof all at once why her entrance had been accomplished so easily. "Oh, I'm not the person you think. I am Betsy Hale and I didn't come to see Miss Helen at all."

Mrs. Bond drew back her hand and looked at her searchingly. "Are you not the girl who was to entertain Miss Helen while she takes her treatment his afternoon?" she asked, very much surprised and a little put out.

Betsy shook her head very decidedly. "I am Betsy Hale, and I never was asked to come here," she confessed. "I came on my own account. I hope you don't mind my coming——"

Mrs. Bond silenced her with a wave of her jeweled hand. "It is evidently a mistake," she said. "I shall have to instruct Jacobs," and she pressed the button firmly. She had quite a business-like air and Betsy remained silent while the tall young man received his orders to keep the young person whom Miss Helen expected in the small hall when she

came and to notify Mrs. Bond at once of her arrival. Then she turned to Betsy.

"And you, my dear?" she said in a cool amused tone. "Have you come merely for a call? Or did your mama send you for——"

Betsy was so horrified that she interrupted: "Oh, no, indeed," she protested earnestly. "She hasn't the faintest idea that I am here, and I do hope that you'll never breathe it to her. It is very important that she should never dream it."

The group began to smile more openly at this odd child. "And why is it so important that she shouldn't know?" asked the young lady with the pink cheeks.

"Why, you see," began Betsy, who suddenly felt that her errand was a rather doubtful one, "she keeps me very select, though she does talk a great deal about being democratic——"

A roar of laughter from the young man shattered her speech for the moment, but as her quick mind grasped his interpretation of her words, she went on bravely, looking at Mrs. Bond now and speaking with greater earnestness.

"I mean that she wouldn't want me to be here selling things, like a book agent or—or—a servant. But——"

It was Mrs. Bond's turn to interrupt. "Selling things?" she repeated. "What sort of things could a little girl like you want to sell? And who sent you here to sell them?"

"Oh, no one—not a single soul!" cried Betsy. "I came of my own accord. I wanted the checks from the coffee for—for—a very good purpose. I felt sure you would not miss them. I thought you used a good deal of coffee—all the company and the servants drinking it, I suppose—and I did so hope you'd buy it from me. But no one sent me. You mustn't think that."

Mrs. Bond looked at her, and perhaps it was a memory of her own pampered child that made her face soften to a very nice sort of smile and her voice grow gentler as she spoke. Betsy, in spite of her odd clothes, made a sweet picture, with her shapely erect head and serious, friendly eyes.

"So you came to sell coffee to me?" she asked with some amusement.

"I should be very, very glad to," replied

Betsy, more hopefully. "It's very good coffee, and you can buy any priced goods you choose. I suppose you would like to see the catalog," she ended, hesitating somewhat. The catalog did not match with the gilding and carving all about, and Betsy was quick to feel its inappropriateness.

Mrs. Bond seemed genuinely interested now. "Tell me how you came here," she said.

Betsy took her words literally. "I came from the village in a buggy," she answered, rather relieved that she had not met with instant denial. "If you've never been in a buggy, you can't think how nice it is. Just as different from a machine as can be." Mrs. Bond nodded, and Betsy recalled that she had been a country girl before she became so very grand. She grew more at her ease, as she went on, "I felt very uncomfortable after I got inside of your gates, it's so different when one really comes to do a thing, you know. I almost turned back."

"What gave us the benefit of your society?" asked the blue lady, smiling, as Betsy thought, like a person behind a counter who wished to sell her goods.

Betsy flushed again at her tone, but she answered steadily. "It would have been silly to go back, when I'd come so far," she explained, more to Mrs. Bond than to her questioner. "And so I came. Perhaps I should have asked the footman, but—I wasn't quite used to him, you see. Our maid left last week and I've almost forgotten how it feels to have a servant in the house."

Another roar of mirth from the young man, but Betsy stood her ground. And because she did not stammer or appear overpowered by the grandeur of her surroundings, Mrs. Bond's interest grew.

"And if I do not buy your coffee, Miss Betsy Hale," she asked, "if I find I need none of your wares, what shall you do then?"

Betsy paled slightly, though she did not falter. "Then I'd just say good-bye and thank you for—for—being so polite to me," she returned bravely, with her head a trifle higher than before. She took a step and paused before she made her curtsy. "May I go now?" she asked, while they all watched her with their smiling eyes. "And I hope you don't mind me having come in at the family door?"

There was an absolute silence as she made her curtsy and started to leave. It was a difficult moment, yet she came through it without defeat. She was quite at the doorway when Mrs. Bond halted her.

"Come back and shake hands with me, Miss Betsy Hale," she commanded, and Betsy, greatly wondering, obeyed.

As her firm slim fingers clasped the soft white hand, Mrs. Bond looked full in her eyes, and Betsy looked back at her with her brave smile. "I hope," said Betsy, "that I haven't bothered you. It's so horrid to have to say no, isn't it?"

Mrs. Bond's finger was on the bell again, and her reply was given in the form of an order to the tall young footman. "Take this young lady to Mrs. Barker's room, Jacobs, and tell her that she is to buy all the coffee she needs from Miss Hale."

It was so sudden that Betsy's head whirled.

She managed her departure very well indeed, considering what a state she was in. She thanked Mrs. Bond very prettily and said a smiling good-bye to the others, and then she followed the silent-footed Jacobs down

an interminable maze of halls and apartments, past gilded doorways and tapestried alcoves till they came at last to a comfortable room where a dignified woman whom Jacobs introduced as Mrs. Barker, took Betsy in, while she examined her list and heard her explanations, and then, after promising absolute secrecy as to the checks she ordered an amount of coffee that simply staggered the unprepared saleswoman.

Betsy waited till she had gotten out of sight of the great ornamental iron gates before she began to skip. It did not seem proper to show her joy until she was once again among the ruts and bushes of the lonely lane, but, once she was alone, she skipped very hard.

"Sometimes six pounds a week! and sometimes seven," she chanted in a low exultant tone. "Oh, how perfectly lovely! It'll only take about five weeks at that rate, and it's just seven weeks till the birthday." And then, catching sight of Emma Clara and the buggy around the curve, she called to her jubilantly:

"You were right! You were right about being lucky. Do hurry and let me get in, till I tell you!"

CHAPTER IX

BETSY HELPS PACK THE MISSIONARY BARREL

“**B**UT it is worth while to tell the truth always,” insisted Betsy. “If I’d have tried to pretend that I was somebody else at Mrs. Bond’s yesterday, they’d have soon found me out and been cross——”

“Lands sakes, you needn’t go that far!” exclaimed Emma Clara rather impatiently. “There’s a heap of difference between acting lies and telling out every last atom of truth you know. If you keep on with this bee in your bonnet, it’s going to sting you good and hard before you’re done with it—mark my words.”

Betsy felt that she was being misunderstood. She was accused of things she had no desire for; nagging and making other people over, and picking holes were far from her aim. All she wanted to do was to tell the

perfect truth, unspotted by shadow of deceit and courageously lovely. Emma Clara simply did not understand. She was sorry so fair a creature should disclose such blemishes. It had been pointed out, however, that it was no affair of her's to amend error, so she turned to the book she had brought.

"It's a nature book this time," she said in a rather remote tone. "You seemed to know so much about the birds and things that I thought you'd like it. It's a lot of sketches on nature by a very——"

"Why, there ain't a picture in it!" interposed Emma Clara, who had been peering at the pages as Betsy opened the volume. "You must have brought the wrong book."

Betsy felt her spirits rise at this mistake on her pupil's part.

"I didn't mean sketches with a brush or pencil," she explained with a tinge of patronage. "These are written sketches—just little short writings, you know—not finished things like stories or books, but nice easy scraps of talking and thinking."

Emma Clara nodded thoughtfully. Her next words made Betsy feel still more com-

fortable. "I've got a lot to learn yet a while," she said wistfully, and then added in a more vigorous tone, "but I don't mind making mistakes, if they learn me things I ought to know. And I don't mind being set right, when it's private and personal-like, though I do hate to make a monkey of myself before folks. / You tell me whenever I make a break, will you? I'll be obliged, I'm sure."

Betsy promised eagerly. Her little feeling of patronage faded into a genuine wish to be useful, and Emma Clara looked so fresh and pretty and earnest that it seemed quite a privilege to help her. Besides, she was almost quite grown up. It gave Betsy quite a thrill to think how old Emma Clara seemed to be.

Emma Clara went on. "The Missionary Barrel is to be packed tonight. Would you like to go with me? I can bring a friend, so that's all right, and you won't mind they're all being grown-up ladies, will you?"

Betsy was too much pleased to hesitate. "Indeed, I'd love it," she said warmly. "I'm sure Mother will let me go, when she knows it's with you. I've told her a good

bit about you, though, of course, I haven't breathed a hint of the readings—nor ever will," she added seriously.

"Will quarter after seven be early enough, and shall I have to let you know before?"

Emma Clara said the time would do very well, and that there was no need of letting her know before that time. "If you ain't here at seven-twenty at the very latest, I'll know you're not coming," she said. "Now, I'll fly about lively and make supper early. See you later," said good-bye, and went down the neat path, through the gate and out on the highway, while Emma Clara bustled about her preparations, singing as she went, and the clearsweet tones sounded pleasantly in Betsy's ears as she walked slowly along in the late afternoon sunshine.

"She's just as sweet as she can be," she thought warmly. "And she does know a lot about housework and birds and—and—all sorts of real things. But she doesn't just understand once in a while."

She loitered along, thinking with great satisfaction of the turn matters had taken. She was looking forward hopefully now to

the fulfilment of each desire she had. But she somehow felt, as many older people have done, that the good things which were to come were still dependent on her own act—on her own goodness. She forgot that a great many other things were working towards the inevitable end—her mother's health and inclinations, the success of the book and many other important items.

"If I'm just good and *true*," she thought, with a little thrill, "It will all come right, I am sure."

She was not conceited. Not at all. She was only tremendously in earnest and her earnestness was centering on the wrong spot. She was one of those who must enter heartily into any endeavor, and even then are barely content with the results.

She crossed the fields to the winding road, meaning to reach the Wee Corner from the back. She had plenty of time, since her mother had told her to stay out as long as she pleased, knowing how eager Sally was for the spring scents and sounds.

The thicket beyond the bushes was waking to life. The bare twigs still showed, but

a light veil of faintest green was flung over them, with here and there a haze of reddish bloom. It was drowsing out of the winter sleep into a hint of summer beauty. A bird swung a clear, liquid note across the soft murmurings of the air in the branches—a jeweled brilliant flash of song.

Betsy stopped at the hedgerow, halted by the throb of melody. She saw the brown bird as its wings fluttered away into the thicket, and her heart sang, too.

“I’ll just go in a little way,” she thought. “Perhaps if I sit very still he’ll sing again.”

She picked her way carefully, reveling in the sense of exploration so novel to her, town-bred as she was. She passed a little dry hollow and found a gray-green lichened stone, where, pulling her skirts about her, she sat down to wait and hope. In her dull brown suit she might have been a wood sprite or a creature of the brown, quickening forest, so well did she match the coloring about her.

She sat very still for what seemed to her a long time. She could hear sounds from across the road and highway, dimmed and muffled by distance, but she was too much concerned

about the bird to heed them. She waited tensely.

A rabbit scurried past and made her start.

Then a bird, perhaps the very bird she waited for, flew into the branches above her and eyed her inquisitively. It chirped and called, but it did not sing. Presently it flew away in alarm. There was a sound of crackling twigs from the other side of the clump of bushes where Betsy was hidden, and the bird fled before the sound.

Betsy's heart stood still. She thought of all the tales of robbers and outlaws she had ever read, and, although the chimneys of the Wee Corner might have been visible to her through the tree-tops had she looked, she sat staring towards the growing sound and began to be rather frightened.

The footsteps were light and quick. They came directly toward her hiding place as though the newcomers were familiar with the thicket. Suddenly they stopped with a rustling and crackling and then there was silence. Betsy waited breathlessly. Her courage came to her in a rush. She did not move, but sat and waited. Was the intruder

peering at her from behind the bushes? Was he crouching for a spring? She shut her lips in a firm line and waited.

The moments seemed to drag into hours, and then—what was it? It sounded like a sob, and Betsy sat up, straining her ears. Hark, there it was again!

A low sound of stifled weeping. There could be no doubt about it. Some one was crying there beyond the bushes. Not out loud, but in low, shaken spasms of grief that cut to the heart.

Betsy rose swiftly with her whole being alive with sympathy, and she softly pushed aside the twigs that interposed. She could see indistinctly, but there could be no mistake about what she saw.

In the little dry hollow a boy was crouched with his head on his arms. A boy, and crying like that!

Betsy caught her breath, though she did not stir. Oh, how dreadfully he must feel, to be crying like that! Who could it be? She leaned silently nearer, parting the twigs noiselessly. The boy turned his head ever so little, and she saw. It was Philip, bright,

laughing, teasing Philip, sobbing his heart out among the dead leaves of last year.

Betsy stood abashed, as though she had spied on sacred mysteries. She let the twigs spring back into place and stood with her hands straining and her face tense, trying to think of some way to comfort him. "Oh, I wish I could help him," she thought in a panic of helplessness. "I wish he didn't have to cry like that."

Even as she was thinking this, the sounds ceased, and then she heard the light footsteps hurrying off in the direction they had come, leaving behind them a great silence and a sense of loss.

A passion of sympathy shook Betsy. She had been a solitary child, in spite of the tender bond between her gifted parents and herself, and she could understand how Philip felt.

"Only I didn't think he could cry like that," she repeated with a hard lump in her own throat at the memory. "I wonder who made him do it?"

She went slowly out of the thicket. She had forgotten the bird that lured her there.

She could not think of anything save Philip's grief. But presently slanting shafts of sunshine reached her from the hill and she looked about with growing interest again. After all, the world was very beautiful. It was more beautiful now than when she had gone into the thicket. Perhaps it was the contrast between the cloud of Philip's grief and the gay lances of golden sunshine.

She did not forget Philip, though she said no word about him to her mother when she finally went in doors. She had to get permission to go to the barrel packing, and there was some discussion as to the propriety of a donation from the Wee Corner that took up a great deal of time and interest. Mrs. Hale had to unpack a trunk and wrap the large package carefully while Sally hurried into her best frock, which was so much like her everyday one that she might have saved herself the trouble.

When Betsy arrived at the Simpson door she found Emma Clara ready and waiting, with a large bundle of her own that matched Betsy's and that brought a sudden fear to Betsy's heart.

"Oh, have you a suit, too?" she asked in consternation. "Perhaps I'd better not take this——"

Emma Clara interrupted eagerly. "Have you a suit—a whole suit?" she asked. "Really a suit—for a man?"

Betsy nodded proudly. "It's a nice new one, too," she enlarged. "It's black, and it has a tail coat, like ministers wear. Father only wore it once to a wedding reception. He was best man. Mother said to tell them she sent it with great pleasure."

"The Ladies' Aid will be pleased," responded Emma Clara, heartily. "They've been wanting a suit, but no one's been able to scare one up. They had to have a good one, you know. But, perhaps," and her face fell, "your father was a small man. This missionary is a regular big one——"

It was Betsy's turn to break in. "Father was six feet one inch tall," she declared proudly. "He was a regular big one, too."

"Then it's all as it should be," said Emma Clara, rejoicing again. "We'd better be off, though, or we'll be late. The services begin sharp seven-thirty."



"OH, HAVE YOU A SUIT, TOO?"

They reached the frame addition to the little church, where the Sunday-school met and where all the various meetings of the church workers were held, just as the first hymn was being sung, and they had to slip in quietly choosing the nearest seats, for the president of the Ladies' Aid, kind Mrs. Worthington, was rather nervously preparing to read the prayers.

Betsy gave herself up to the simple service with all her heart. The bulky bundle by her chair added not a little to her comfort, it is true, but she responded to the appeal of the spirit of the hour with a quickened memory of that grievous sorrowing figure of Philip in the wood. The hymns touched her more deeply, the prayers went closer to her soul than ever before. The sense of spiritual needs grew in her. She was very, very serious.

After the formal part was over, it was rather a let-down to find the ladies so brisk and chatty.

The suit had been examined, pronounced just the thing, and a suitable message of warm thanks had been proposed, and everything was cozy and sociable.

Betsy sat quietly or stood politely handing articles to the packers when they needed her services. She was deft and silent. Her mind was not on the outer world. She could not help, however, hearing all that went on. The chat was brisker than the packing, and, as tea and cake was to be served before the party broke up, there was a social spirit abroad unloosing the tongues and thoughts of the ladies to an unwonted degree.

"I hear Mrs. Bond has promised to come to the Fair," volunteered Mrs. Harris, folding an unbleached muslin night-dress. "Jenny Parsons says it's all because of that sickly Helen having taken a whim. Well, it's an ill wind that blows nobody good. We'll be richer for it, or I'm much mistaken."

This news was received with much interest. "It's Jenny's second trip to the Shrubberies," said another lady when she could be heard. "She's keeping right on with it, I suppose?"

Mrs. Harris shook her head. "Jenny's not there now," she replied, pursing her lips. "She couldn't get on with Helen, so Mrs. Bond sent her off. Jenny wanted to stay. It wasn't her fault, poor girl, but that Helen

said she wouldn't have a stone image about her unless it was a mighty good-looking one. So they sent Jenny off."

"Dear me, that's the second girl in two weeks, isn't it?" asked gentle Mrs. Bean. "And Jenny is well meaning, though she is a little, just a little, solid. I can't say I've ever heard her say two words myself."

The talk drifted on about Mrs. Bond and Helen and the way they wasted things at the Shrubberies. "Lights lighted in all the rooms, no matter if there ain't a soul there," said Mrs. Giles, now becoming rather gloomy. "And them fellows in short pants with fancy coats standin' about idle all the day long. It ain't scriptural, no, that it ain't. No wonder that cantakerous Helen's a half cripple like she is."

Betsy, listening with surprise, wondered at the vigor of the speech. Surely Mrs. Giles had forgotten the large contributions which had been part of the gossip about Mrs. Bond. She wanted to speak, but she bit her lip and kept silent. Resentment was rising within her, though, and it needed but a touch of flame into fire. Truth must out.

Crushed to the earth, it was sure to rise again.

"That Philip Meade's come back again, I see," said Mrs. Dunn, carelessly. "He's the same as ever, though they do say his father can't last the week out."

"I never saw a boy with less heart," agreed Miss Wilson. "He's on the grin all the day. I've no patience with him."

"He seems a very nice boy to me," gently interposed little Mrs. Bean. She was a newcomer to the village and was much respected because of her good furniture and pretty clothes.

Betsy held her breath. Someone would take up Philip's cause, surely. But there was only the silence that had so maddened her before. The ladies primly shut their lips, leaving all sorts of dire things to be imagined.

The accusing, ominous silence went to Betsy's head. Philip heartless? Philip not grieving for his father? And she had seen him not over two hours ago his heart breaking, weeping alone!

She turned on the circle with flaming

cheeks and her words choked in her throat, so eager were they to be out.

"Oh!" she cried. "Oh, how can you? How can you say he is heartless? It isn't fair to condemn people unless you know. Philip isn't half so mean as you seem to think he is. Most of the village boys are a lot worse than he." Swept along by her rage for truth and pity for Philip she forgot to tell the story of the sorrow she knew was darkening the boy's days while he bravely hid it from sight; she forgot the right way to their sympathy, and boldly she flung her firebrands among them. "All of the village boys are worse," she declared hotly, before anyone could recover. "The Freeman boys go with the tough railway gang, and that Harper boy sneaks candy from the lunch-woman at school——"

A rustle and angry cough interrupted her. The smiling circle flashed into indignation.

Someone put a gentle arm about Betsy and drew her into the little darkened library. Betsy could remember the snuffy smell of the books for a long while afterward. "I wouldn't say any more, my dear," murmured Mrs.

Bean's kind voice. "It is very hard, I know, but it's better not to say anything more. Run home, like a good girl, and I'll explain to the ladies that you didn't mean to be unkind."

Betsy was too bewildered to protest. She slipped into her coat which had been put with the other wraps in the little room, and with a murmur which Mrs. Bean seemed to understand, she opened the door and stepped out into the peaceful night. The surge of feeling that had been so hot and tumultuous slowly subsided as she walked alone under the distant quiet stars, but she walked home with a firm and elastic tread.

"It was the truth," she thought, obstinately. "It was the real, real truth."

But she did not tell her mother what had happened, nevertheless.

CHAPTER X

MRS. DELANEY'S ADVICE

SOMETHING of the glow of last night's resolution came back to Betsy when she saw the note pinned to the shed door.

Jimmy had not yet appeared for his duties to the coal buckets, and she recognized the scrawled, half-printed hand on the scrap of paper as his. Once or twice before when he had been obliged to be late he had sent a comrade with such a missive. This note, however, was not so reassuring. It was very brief.

"I hav a nother engagment. No more coal from

"youres truly

"J. DELANEY.

"P. S.—You got too big eys for me. I ant a thief."

Here was another proof that Betsy's thirst for the absolute truth was not popular. Her

preachings had been too much for the lively Jimmy, added to her constant watch upon his movements while he was doing his work at the Wee Corner. Betsy began to feel like a sort of martyr to the cause. Irritation at Jimmy's delinquency made her overlook her own lack of charitableness. She ground the coffee with a snap that brought the color to her cheeks.

"He's just horrid," she said sharply. But she did not show the note to her mother when she came down. She told her the bare fact that Jimmy was not coming and offered to go over to Delaneys after breakfast to find out his mother's views on the matter.

Mrs. Hale was too happily absorbed in poaching eggs for the toast that Betsy was making to care much about the matter of Jimmy. "It's pretty late in the season for the dining-room heater, anyway," she said absently. "Perhaps it would be good exercise for me to try to keep the kitchen fire supplied."

Her cheeks were unnaturally flushed and her eyes looked very large and bright, but, nevertheless, Betsy felt uneasy at such a

suggestion. And Mrs. Hale herself seemed to realize that Jimmy was a necessity, for a while at least. "I suppose it wouldn't do for me," she added, quickly. "We need bread, too, so perhaps it will be best for you to run over directly after breakfast. Mrs. Delaney said she would be baking this morning, and she's always very early."

That settled it, and Betsy felt that the sanction of authority was on her errand. She set out with a comfortable feeling that she was going to do her mother's behest rather well.

She bungled her mission, however, for instead of merely asking whether Jimmy's decision was approved by his mother, she got tangled up in her own views on the matter, ending by going rather too deeply into her knowledge of Jimmy's private life. She was all the more emphatic because Mrs. Delaney kept very quiet and seemed to withhold her judgment.

"He's always with the railway gang, just like the Freeman boys; I heard Mr. Simpson say so. And he said, too, that Jimmy was in a fair way to be a good-for-nothing if some-

one didn't stop him, that you ought to have an eye on his tricks," she declared, ending with a flushed face and quickened breath. "It's the truth, and you ought to know it!"

Mrs. Delaney, contrary to her custom, was very silent. Her broad, kind face was paler than usual and she held her mouth tight at the corners. When Betsy finished and stood quivering for an answer, she roused herself with a flash of real rage.

"And ye call that the truth?" she demanded in a tone Betsy had never heard before. "Truth is it, thin? It's a gran' name ye're givin' it. Tale-bearin's a better word fer it. Ye're a meddlin' little tattle-tale."

She stopped so suddenly that Betsy started. She had been holding herself tense in the moment of the outburst and she thought worse was yet to come. She braced herself, though her heart chilled within her.

Mrs. Delaney was very silent. The alarm clock on the shelf over the table ticked very loud, and the crackling of the wood in the range sounded tremendous. Gradually a change came over the broad Irish face. A

kinder expression came into the little brilliant eyes, and the mouth relaxed into its usual easy curve, though a great seriousness was behind them all.

She put out a hand to Betsy. "Never mind, colleen. I was scarin' ye with me tempers, wasn't I? I was a bit hasty. Though it's well fer me that ye spoke up as ye did, puttin' me onto Jimmy's ways, though it's turrible hard on you, fer meddlin' in other folks' pies is a nasty business anny way ye take it. But you're a lone bit of a thing, with your books and your typewriter machines and niver a child to play about with and to knock the nonsense out of your precious head."

The note of kindness melted Betsy at once. Tears of contrition rushed to her eyes, though she kept them back bravely. "I'm sorry I made you cross; indeed I am," she said very earnestly. "I didn't mean to say that about Jimmy when I started. But," she added with a touch of the zeal that had brought her into trouble, "it really is better for you to know. His soul is of more importance than anything else, isn't it?"

Mrs. Delaney was moved, too, and her large warm hand covered Betsy's cold little one. She spoke slowly, as though to impress her words on her hearer's mind.

"You see, machree, it's ticklish wurr-rk—this steerin' other folks' gear," she said kindly. "It takes two to make it go. You've got to be turrible understandin'—that's one. And the other crayter has got to be ekilly understandin', or there'll be a mess o' it."

Betsy recalled the Barrel Packing with growing misgivings, as her friend went on.

"An' one more thing. Are ye sure of yer aim? Ye kin fire away at the sinners, but mayhap ye'll be hittin' them in the wrong place. Ye've got to see yer mark good and clear and make no mistake about it. Aimin' at the sin ain't all easy wark, for, mark ye, ye've only the *outside* view of it to guide ye. Ye say to yersel', 'it's that bad action's the bull's-eye fer me,' and ye blaze away like all creation. But do you hit the mark? Ah, it's seldom enough—seldom enough. And for why, think ye?"

Betsy, beginning to have a glimmer, was not sure enough. She shook her head.

"It's becuse ye've chose the wrong bull's-eye," said Mrs. Delaney, growing more earnest every minute. "Ye've took the actions to aim at, and it's the ginerall way; but the onlyest spot that can be hit is the Secret Heart of them." She paused dramatically. "The Secret Heart of them. Just that."

Betsy drew a long breath, but did not speak. She wanted to hear it all. And, beside, she was rather husky in her throat.

"'Tis the Secret Heart as rules us all, God save us," Mrs. Delaney said, softly. "Poor though we may be, or homely as mud, in our secret hearts we're all a-believin' that we're somethin' else—somethin' grander and better than we'll ever be. Think on that, machree. Yer young, and by that token hard on the sins. You see the outside, and ye say 'tis black, wicked. Ah, if ye cud take a peep into that secret heart inside, you might wait a bit before you shot yer bolt. Try speedin' it with kindness to hit the mark, instid of scolding, and send it wingin' to the aim with a bit of love and a bit of hope and a bit of trust in the Great Feyther of us all."

Betsy caught both of the warm, work-worn

hands in her own. "Oh, Mrs. Delaney, how beautiful!" she said, low and breathless from emotion. "I never thought of it like that. Oh, I'm so sorry to have said what I did!"

Mrs. Delaney squeezed her fingers hard, and then patted her on the shoulder. "Say no more of that, machree," she replied with her smile breaking out. "We've both larned something we shan't forget in a hurry. Ye've said the words of sorrow and that wipes the slate between us. 'Tis a poor crayter that won't take the regrets of a friend. And now, yer bread's ready fer ye and me pies is cryin' out to be in the oven. So go long with ye, and me respects to yer ma. Mind ye tell her nawthin' of the little chat we've been havin'—it's a private and personal topic, ye mind."

Betsy was only too glad to promise, and she went down the hill with her bread, feeling that she had come into a new kingdom.

"The Secret Heart," she whispered, as she stopped to watch the stream hurrying between its green banks. "The Secret Heart—oh, how beautiful it sounds. Like a piece of poetry or a fairy tale."

She looked back over her zealous truth-

telling and the memory was not pleasing now. How hard she had been aiming at the outside, and how little she had thought of those other people's feelings! She fairly shuddered at her own blindness, now that Mrs. Delaney had made her see. If she could only take it all back. Wait—there should be some way to make amends. She could come on it if only she had time enough.

She sat down on the parapet of the bridge, hugging the warm bundle of good-smelling bread, prepared to spend a long while in thought, when the last words of the hearty Irishwoman came back to her strongly—"The word of sorrow wipes the slate between us. . . . 'Tis a poor crayter that won't take the regrets of a friend."

That was it. She must say those words of sorrow to each one she had wronged. It was the only amends in her power. "Though I'm not exactly a friend of any of them," she thought doubtfully. "Except, of course, like everybody's friends at church."

The plan formed quickly as she was walking briskly home. She would finish her lessons, then go on her penitential rounds of

calls. She must apologize to at least four people—Mrs. Giles, because she had flung those hot words directly at that worthy lady; Mrs. Bean, because she longed to set herself right with the gentle means of her escape from further damage; Mrs. Freeman and Mrs. Harper, on the score of the accusations against their sons. She sighed as she faced the prospect, but she was not made of the stuff that falters before a duty that has been made plain.

She got through her lesson and then hurried off towards the village, hope rising within her at every step. Things were always easier once one began to do them. The round of calls did not seem half so formidable to her now that she was really started.

It was not hard to find Mrs. Giles. A sound of wheezy coughing at the back of her little house led Betsy directly to her. Mrs. Giles was emptying a feather bed into a new ticking, and she stood in a whirl of tiny white feathers, like a private snowstorm. She looked up as Betsy approached.

“Ah, it’s you,” was all that she said. The feathers made her wheeze too much for

speech. She did not look half so imposing in the white dustcap as she did in the black braid bonnet with the pansies on it.

Betsy plunged at once into the heart of things. "I've come to say I am very sorry to have been so—so rude last night," she said valiantly. "It was very wrong of me to speak that way."

Mrs. Giles seemed to have expected something quite different. She straightened up, with the tick held tight, and peered at Betsy from her little cloud of white feathers. Her face was all puckered with puzzled lines.

"What did you say?" she asked.

Betsy repeated her little speech. She felt rather odd, being stared at like that.

"Ah, indeed, indeed," was all that Mrs. Giles said at first, and then as her mind came more away from the feather bed and got a clearer idea of Betsy's intention in coming to see her, a queer, twisted, kinky smile made its way to her eyes and then to her mouth, and finally she chuckled outright, nodding a great many times in a pleased way.

"That is as it should be—as it should be," she said to herself. "An impudent child

should pay up. Did your mother tell you to say that, or did she just send you here?"

"Oh, she doesn't know anything about it," protested Betsy, pained at the thought. "I came myself, because I was sorry to have spoken so. I——"

"You came of your own accord?" asked Mrs. Giles, rather skeptically. "Are you sure your mother didn't send you, child? Young ones ain't quick to cry shame on themselves that-a-way—not to my knowledge and belief."

Betsy made her understand how it was at last, and then Mrs. Giles, smiling her twisted smile, laid down her feather bed on the wash-bench by the kitchen door, and brought Betsy into the most spotless kitchen that could be dreamed of, and gave her three cookies out of a big stone crock behind the stove. "For acting like a Christian for once," she explained. They were very good friends after that, particularly when Betsy admired the shining state of the stove wherein she saw her own face as in a mirror.

"I guess I am a bit stove-proud," confessed Mrs. Giles, melting still more to her. "But

we all have our fancies—we all have our fancies. Tell me how you folks get along without hired help?" she asked abruptly. "I hear your mama is mighty poorly. Is she right sickly, or just ailing? She ain't about much in the town, so's one can see for themselves, you know. I guess she'll join the Ladies' Aid and the Pastor's Circle after a bit, won't she?"

She seemed to have no interest whatever in poor Philip and as Betsy could not tell her of the scene in the thicket she had to be content to answer the questions as best she could, and then, with other errands and the lateness of the morning as an excuse, to say her farewells as promptly as possible.

Mrs. Giles went out to her feather bed again and said good-bye in the same little private snow storm as before. "Come in and see me again," she called after Betsy as she closed the gate. "Tell your mama I'm coming right over soon's I have time. I ain't much of a caller, though."

Betsy escaped with a feeling as of a great ordeal over. She went next to the Freemans and to Harpers, where she had the good

fortune to find both ladies at home, since it was still, in spite of Betsy's excuses to Mrs. Giles, quite early. Mrs. Freeman was, like Mrs. Giles, surprised and puzzled at first, but she soon forgot to wonder at Betsy's coming in her interest as to how much Betsy knew of the Harper boy's delinquencies. It was almost as hard to evade her questions as it was to escape from the same sort of catechism as to the Freeman boys when she found Mrs. Harper at the sweet-pea beds where she was dropping the withered seed into the warm earth. Betsy had to hurry off with a very short call there, for Mrs. Harper was a stronger character than any of the others and she had a way with her that was very determined.

It was a relief to come to Mrs. Bean's pretty house. "She'll be nice and comfortable," thought Betsy, remembering the soft voice and hands. "I do hope she is home."

Mrs. Bean was at home, and welcomed her visitor with a pretty grace that matched her furniture and clothes. "We won't say any more about it, my dear," she told Betsy, when

the first words were said. "You see your mistake and that's quite enough, I think. You are coming to the Fair, I suppose. If you aren't already bespoken, I'd like you to be one of my aids. I have the Flower Basket—an idea of my own—and I need two aids. Selma Worthington is to be one, if she gets home in time. I am so glad," she added with a light on her face, "that I wasn't mistaken, though, in Philip Meade. He reminded me so much of a dear boy I used to know—" and she seemed to forget Betsy in some memory that brought tears to her eyes and a flush to her withered cheeks, and then, in another tone, she explained the duties of the aids and finally sent Betsy on her way, happier than she had dreamed of being so soon.

How delightfully it was all coming out!

"It's just as Mrs. Delaney said," thought Betsy as she went her way. "They aren't any of them so criss-cross as they were last night. It was my fault, of course."

Emma Clara received her with her usual kindness. It was evident that with her once a friend meant always a friend. She had not a hint of reproach for Betsy's escapade of the

night before. When the story of the calls was ended, she surprised Betsy not a little by giving her a hearty kiss.

"That's the way to behave," she said, patting Betsy's shoulder. "If you've done anything amiss, say you're sorry and have done with it," and so she dismissed the subject, much to Betsy's comfort.

"I'll have to run now, for Mother will be waiting for the mail and the stage was up long ago," said Betsy, feeling more comfortable all the time.

Emma Clara waved her a cheery farewell and Betsy kept turning and waving a response till she was out of sight over the brow of the hill. She felt very comfortable indeed now.

"It's wonderful how nice people are when one takes them the right way, she thought as she went towards the store. "I'm going to try being nice to Jimmy, too. I guess I've been pretty hard on him."

There was no mail except the morning paper, and she ran home, hoping to find her mother in the garden. Mrs. Hale was not there, nor was she in the sunny kitchen, and just as Betsy gained the dining-room a sound

of something falling shook the flooring above her head. It came from the little back room which was used for a bathroom. Someone had dropped something very heavy, or——.

Betsy did not stop to think. She fled through the sitting-room and up the stairs in a sudden panic of fear.

“Oh, Mother!” she called. “Mother, where are you?”

CHAPTER XI

THE DARKEST HOUR IS JUST BEFORE DAWN

MRS. HALE was half sitting, half lying on the bathroom floor when Betsy burst in upon her. Her face was very pale, though she smiled up at her frightened daughter very reassuringly.

"I must have been rather giddy," she explained faintly. "I think I fell down when I was turning to leave the room. I'm quite myself now, though. I can get up very nicely, you see," and disdaining Betsy's outstretched hands, she rose and walked a few steps in a decidedly wobbly manner.

Betsy was very badly frightened. Even the sight of her mother on her feet did not compose her. She had never seen anyone faint before, and she was shocked and trembling, so that she could scarcely speak. She made a valiant effort to insist on her mother taking rest before going down to luncheon

which was nearly ready, but she was hardly able to control her own voice and Mrs. Hale was not to be plead with.

"I'll feel better when I've had some coffee and toast," she declared, and so there was nothing for Betsy to do but acquiesce.

She watched her very anxiously, however, until she was in her chair at the head of the table, and then she hurried the luncheon on as quickly as possible. Her mother made a pretense of eating, declaring that she was quite herself again, and that she should go out of doors at once. The sunshine, she thought, would finish her cure.

Betsy helped her on with the loose coat that she usually wore and saw her out to the summer house, where she sat down on one of the chairs they had left there. She looked much paler out there in the bright light, although she said she was feeling much better. Betsy left her with many misgivings and she looked out of the window many times during the dish-washing to assure herself that she was still there.

The last time that she looked, just as she was putting away the very last dish, the chair

was empty and her mother was lying in a crumpled heap on the grass before the summer house. She had fainted again.

It was a more serious matter this time.

Betsy had to summon all her efforts to rouse her, and when she had finally come to herself enough to be led into the house, she sank dazed and bewildered on the carpet lounge in the sitting-room with such a blank and suffering look on her face that Betsy was beside herself.

"Oh, what shall I do?" she cried in despair.

"Oh, please, tell me what to do!"

Mrs. Hale groaned and faltered out the doctor's name.

"But I can't leave you like this!" cried poor Betsy. "Oh, what shall I do? What shall I do?"

A knocking at the back door seemed the answer. She flew to open it to Emma Clara Simpson, whose fresh, smiling face was the best sight that the distracted Betsy could have seen. She fairly dragged her friend into the sitting-room, where her mother was still sitting in that dazed state.

"Stay with her, oh, please stay with her

while I run for the doctor," she panted, and before another word was said, she was away with the speed of the wind.

The doctor's house was on the other side of the village and as she ran up the hilly road, taking a short cut across the fields, she came to the gate just as the doctor was emerging from the house. A few breathless words told him her errand, and they were soon chugging along the road back to the Wee Corner.

How short a distance it seemed in spite of her great anxiety. She was in the house before the doctor had gotten his case from beneath the seat to follow her. She flew into the sitting-room to find it empty, and, forgetting everything else, she hurried up-stairs filled with unformed dread.

The door of her mother's room was ajar and she went in.

Emma Clara in her fresh blue dress sat by the bed, gently rubbing Mrs. Hale's hands and smoothing down the covers over the light form that showed so slight and fragile under the covers. Everything was calm and quiet and composed. Mrs. Hale

smiled weakly at Betsy and would have spoken if Emma Clara had not signed to her.

"She's quite comfortable now," she told Betsy. "I got hot water bags to her feet and some hot milk for her and she's beginning to feel pretty good."

She stopped at the sight of the doctor's figure in the doorway, and rising in some confusion, would have slipped out had he not motioned her to stay.

Betsy was the one who went down-stairs. She slipped away very thankfully with her heart full of gratitude to Emma Clara and the doctor, who both seemed to know just what to do and how to do it. Her beloved mother was in good hands, she knew, and though she was still in an agony of anxiety, she sat herself down on the lounge and waited very patiently for the doctor to come down-stairs.

He came in a surprisingly short time. He shook hands with Betsy in a mechanical way and then looked sharply at her.

"Have you no older person in the family?" he asked. "You seem very young."

"I am nearly fourteen," answered Betsy doubtfully. "There isn't anyone else."

He shook his head. "Well, then, I must give my instructions to you," he told her with a tinge of reluctance in his manner. "Your mother is not very ill—remember that and don't get frightened. But she is run down and tired and she must have—absolutely must have rest and building up. You must see to it that she has this tonic and gets plenty of fresh eggs and good steak. She is not to be worried about anything. Not under any consideration," he repeated emphatically, "is she to be worried. Put that typewriter of her's away where she can't even see it, and make her keep out of doors."

He paused, looking more kindly at Betsy's intent face. "It's a tough job for one of your years, but you look as though you had plenty of grit," he said, drawing on his gloves. "See that you do as I say, and if you are in doubt about anything come to me."

He was off before she could recover enough to ask any questions. She went over to the desk and got out a tablet and wrote down every word he had said, even the sentence about herself. She wanted to be very accurate.

Then she tiptoed up to where Emma Clara still sat at the bedside, gently smoothing Mrs. Hale's white hand. It was very peaceful there and the sun flecked the white bed with little golden dancing lights. Betsy kissed her mother softly and then crept downstairs. When she was alone her face grew very sorrowful.

"I don't know how she is to be kept from being worried," she said to herself. "She told me yesterday that she could only take a week's vacation because we had spent almost everything we had on hand, and she'd have to begin writing on her regular work as soon as she possibly could."

She sat for a while thinking hard, but after a little, her thoughts went round and round the same circle without getting anywhere, like a squirrel in a cage; so she got up and went out into the kitchen with a restless hope of finding something there that would be worth doing.

A shadow passed the window and she flew to the door. She thought it was Philip, but it proved to be Jimmy Delaney, with a rather sober face and a letter in his hand.

"Doc told me she was sick," he said, handing over the letter. "So I thought I'd git the mail. I know she's allus lookin' for it."

He was gone before Betsy could speak, but she was too much agitated by the stamped name on the envelope to think of him just then.

"It's from the publisher's she sent the book to," she whispered, and she was going up-stairs with it when a sudden fear halted her.

"If they hadn't taken it!" she thought. "Oh, suppose they hadn't taken it."

No, she must not show it to her mother now. She would have to wait. But suppose the book was accepted? Her mother ought to know it, for it would help to make her well. Slowly she came to her decision. "I'll open it," she said, trembling at her own temerity. "If it's good I'll tell her and if it isn't I'll hide it."

It took all the courage she had to cut the end off the envelope and to draw out the sheet. Her hand shook so she could scarcely unfold it.

"Oh, if they've only taken it," she breathed and then she braced herself up to look.

It was a printed form merely acknowledging the receipt of the manuscript and assuring the writer that it should be given immediate attention. Betsy collapsed on the nearest chair, laughing a little and crying a little, too, in relief.

"I might have known it," she said, her memory coming to her. "It's barely reached the publishers and I was thinking they'd have had time to read all that long lot of pages. Oh, dear, how silly I am," she said, but she felt so much more despondent than she had been before that she feared to meet anyone.

She longed for poor old Jemima or for the sympathetic Mac, and then she bethought herself of her other refuge in times of perplexity or idleness. Out to the barn she went forthwith and climbed into the buggy in the dusky, cobwebby silence of the quiet place, and she hid her face in her hands.

"Oh, dear, what shall we ever do?" she said half aloud. "If Mother isn't to write any more till she's quite, quite well, how are we to get along?"

She raised her head to listen to the squeaking

of the mice in the walls. She could think of nothing save the doctor's warning and the absolute commands he had laid upon her. It was the darkest hour that she had ever known.

A step outside made her start. It was a man's tread and it was very near the closed door.

"Who's that?" she called sharply.

All sorts of direful visions rose in her mind. It must be the doctor come back because her mother was worse, or it might be Mr. Amos Atkinson bent on revenge. The very worst sort of things were happening to her now. She scrambled out of the buggy as best she could, but she was not quick enough.

The big door slid gently open and a man stood on the threshold.

CHAPTER XII

THE TURN OF THE LONG LANE

WHEN Mr. Eleazer Simpson gently pushed the big door open Betsy did not realize that her darkest moment was over, and that better things were coming to her.

She was too much ashamed of being found moping by herself, with red eyes and swollen nose, to be glad of Mr. Simpson's coming. "Oh," she said rather abashed at his gaze, "I didn't know it was you, Mr. Simpson, or I shouldn't have called. I thought it was someone else."

Mr. Simpson kindly withdrew his gaze from her features and fixed them on the buggy. "Emma Clara ain't nowhere about, I s'pose?" he asked mildly. "Mrs. Holcomb said she seen her comin' this way a bit ago. I was just a-goin' out by the back way when I heard you call out that-away. Didn't mean to intrude, I'm sure."

"Emma Clara is in the house," Betsy told him as she came toward the door. "Mother fainted and she is staying with her for a little while. Shall I call her?"

Mr. Simpson rubbed his whiskers reflectively. He did not seem in a hurry to go. "S'pose you don't want to sell that buggy?" he asked carelessly. "Mebbe you're figurin' on gettin' a horse yourself, perhaps?"

Betsy's heart gave a great leap. "Oh, would you want to buy it?" she asked. "I—I think we'd like to sell it, for I'm perfectly positive we shan't ever have a horse."

Mr. Simpson walked in, and gave the buggy an exhaustive examination. He shook its wheels and felt its bolts and finally he said in a thoughtful tone. "Seems to be in pretty good shape. Old Gun, he had it done up just before he died. Yes, it's all right. What are you askin' for it?"

Betsy was nonplussed. "I'd have to ask Mother, I suppose," she replied, "but I don't believe she'll know how much to charge for it. Don't you know what it's worth?"

Mr. Simpson looked at the buggy and then into Betsy's trustful eyes, and whistled softly.

It was a trying moment for a man with a strong taste for a bargain.

"Well," he said, scratching his chin very hard, "it's worth all of twenty dollars as it stands. I'd want that much for it if I was a-sellin' it, and I can't say no fairer."

Betsy felt as though she had unearthed a gold mine. "Did you say twenty dollars?" she asked, merely to reassure herself.

"Twenty to the dot, and not a cent more," he replied, adding with a tinge of regret, "I ain't a-sayin' I'd set a price on it for anyone and everyone, but to oblige—," and the wave of his hand expressed his regard for Betsy's age and sex.

It was quite easy to make the other necessary arrangements with him. Betsy promised to let him know at once, so soon as she had seen her mother and it was agreed that the affair should be a secret between them, as Mr. Simpson wished to surprise Emma Clara. If Mrs. Hale consented he would come for it that evening while his daughter was at choir practice, and he would leave the money in an envelope at the post office the next morning.

“So Emma Clara won’t get on to it,” he explained. “That girl’s so cute that she sees right through me most of times. And I’m right set on her being surprised—I am that.”

It seemed quite a certainty that the buggy was to become the property of the Simpsons, and Betsy, as she went back to the house, was trying hard to brace up her courage to simply tell her mother, when she was able to hear it, that Mr. Simpson had bought the buggy. It was such a tremendous affair to her that she was actually trembling again, when she met Emma Clara on her way through the dining-room.

“Don’t you fret yourself so,” advised her kind friend. “Your mother is going to be lots better now. She’s asleep and when she wakes up I’ll be over to see you again. We’ll have a sort of party in the summer house; it’s warm enough, thank goodness, and everything will be as cozy as you’d wish.”

Betsy thanked her with such a constrained air that Emma Clara grew more emphatic. “The doctor says it’s a mercy she fainted and made an end of it, for if she’d gone on a

few weeks longer, she'd have been real sick," she told Betsy vigorously. "You must brace up and thank your stars she's no worse. It's only a matter of resting and being fed up, the doctor says."

Betsy smiled as brightly as she could, but she wished that Emma Clara would not look at her so closely and she was really glad when her friend had gone. She went to the desk in the sitting-room and she read over the doctor's instructions very carefully.

"Not under any consideration is she to be worried," she repeated.

Then she went up-stairs very softly and looked at her sleeping mother. How pretty she was, with the fair hair curling about her delicate face and the golden lights playing over her folded hands.

"She never cared a snap about it, anyway," thought Betsy. "What's an old buggy, compared to making her comfortable?"

As she went down-stairs she made up her mind. "I'd rather be a dreadful sinner than to have her worry," she declared, and she sat down at the desk and wrote a little note to Mr. Simpson, which she found a chance to

slip into the mail-box while Emma Clara, according to agreement, was sitting in the summer house with her mother.

Mrs. Hale seemed so much brighter after she was dressed and up that Betsy's first panic soon passed, and, except for her brief excursion with the note, she spent a pleasant afternoon that seemed all the more comfortable by contrast with the black morning. The thought of what was coming in the mail the next morning was very stimulating.

And, as is often the case, one good thing ushered in another. Since the darkest moment was over, the dawn of hope grew brighter and brighter. Two good things happened almost at once.

Philip Meade, who had heard at school of Mrs. Hale's illness, brought a basket of eggs and a plump young chicken as a present to the invalid, and under the eggs, in the very bottom of the basket, Betsy found, after he had gone, a well-used copy of "St. Valentine's Day" with a scrap of paper in it, at the place where the Clan Chattan included the names of various prominent families. "He came from Caithness," was scribbled on

it, and Betsy knew Philip was indicating Mr. Gun, their late tenant.

She showed the book to her mother and Emma Clara, who eagerly suggested that a chapter or two might be read—if Mrs. Hale could bear it. Mrs. Hale vowed she should love it, that she had not read it since she was a girl, and so Betsy sat down between them with her dull brown sweater tied about her shoulders and began the tale of stout Harry of the Wynd and the fair Catherine Glover.

It was like a pleasant island after a troubled voyage. The island held other treasures, however, and they had not got half through the second chapter before the sound of a motor made them look up. The Bond limousine was stopping at the gate and Mrs. Bond was preparing to get out.

Emma Clara made her escape while the footman was holding open the door for his mistress to step out of the machine. "I'll be over again afterward," she whispered as she fled. "She ain't coming to call on me," she said to their protests and she disappeared before the stately Mrs. Bond had reached the gate.

To Betsy the half hour of that formal call was filled with apprehension. She hardly heard what was really passing, and she was so relieved when the call was over that she slipped away with her little curtsy to meet Mrs. Bond at the gate as she was leaving in order to say earnestly:

"Oh, thank you so very, very much for not mentioning the coffee. It's such a very particular secret, you see."

Mrs. Bond smiled at her in a very gracious manner. "Your secrets are quite safe with me, Miss Betsy Hale," she said very kindly. "I shall never tell on you, my dear."

She passed into her car with another smile, and Betsy went back to her mother with a light heart. There was some color in Mrs. Hale's cheeks. The little incident had stimulated her. She spoke brightly. "She's quite pleasant and sociable, I'm sure. It will be very pleasant to meet some civilized people again. I hope the weather proves fine. A garden party in May is a problem——"

"A garden party!" exclaimed Betsy in surprise. "Who—what——?"

Mrs. Hale laughed. "Of course you didn't

hear. It was just as she was leaving. She will invite us to the garden party she is giving on the twenty-first, and she spoke, too, of hoping that you would be at the Fair on Saturday. She seems to want you to meet her daughter."

The presentiment which shot into Betsy's mind at those last words was blotted out in the joy of the coming invitation. To go to a garden party, to be among flowers and festivity, to mingle with gay crowds such as she imagined at garden parties, was too delightful to allow her to stop to think of Helen Bond and her changing entertainers. If she were to be selected for the successor of Jenny and her kind, she would not think of it now.

"Oh, Mother, what shall we wear?" she asked. "We must be very, very dressy, mustn't we?"

Mrs. Hale grew thoughtful. "I have that fine lace dress I got for that last wedding," she said. "It could be touched up a bit, I suppose. And my last year's hat is just right for it."

Betsy, remembering the beauty of the simple white lace robe which lay folded away in the

big trunk, and the flat hat with the big rose on it, declared that her mother would be perfectly ravishingly lovely in it. "You'll be twice as beautiful as anyone there," she declared ardently.

Mrs. Hale actually blushed at her ardor. "But how about you, Betsy girl?" she said doubtfully. "You haven't anything very fresh and——"

Betsy thought she saw signs of worry appearing and hastened to dispel them. "I've a perfectly good white dress that I hardly wore last summer," she said bravely. "And the new ribbons I got at Christmas will make a pretty good belt and tie. Don't you think," she went on a little wistfully, "that I'd look pretty well in the pale blue belt and tie? Plenty of girls wear them on white dresses and it would make mine look more—more *stylish*."

Mrs. Hale laughed at the word. "Is that what you'd like, Betsy girl, to look *stylish*?" she asked with amused interest. "I didn't know you cared about such things. Your white dress will do well enough for the Fair, but I don't know about it for the

Garden Party. We'll have to see about that."

Emma Clara came back before more could be said, and no more was said on the matter. The chapter was finished and then Mrs. Hale went indoors to escape the growing chill. Emma Clara saw her comfortably tucked up on the carpet-covered lounge and then she left.

The day ended very cosily. They had a light supper on the tray beside Mrs. Hale's lounge, and then they sat for a while talking of many things, pleasant memories and hopes for the future, and through it all, though Betsy searched for it with care, not a trace of the dreaded worry showed itself on her mother's pretty face. It was about a quarter to nine o'clock that a careful listener might have heard subdued sounds from the barn, and a rumbling murmur of wheels unaccompanied by the tread of horses' feet.

Betsy went to bed in a whirl of emotion. "I've done two very wicked things today," she thought, "I've opened the letter—and that's a real crime—and I've sold mother's buggy. I guess I'm as bad as plenty of people who are sitting in prison right now."

It was strange that she was not more depressed. She accounted for it to herself with some complacency. "It's because my secret heart means to do right," she said as she got into bed. "It's the secret heart that counts every time."

She was in the same mood the next morning when she brought Mr. Simpson's letter from the mail, and, investigating it in the privacy of the barn, found two crisp ten dollar notes inside of it. The empty place left by the buggy was quite filled by the sight of those yellow-backed bills. Then the question arose—should she tell her mother now, or wait till the need was greater?

It was hard to decide. She thought it better to let chance decide for her. It was strange how many secrets were accumulating about this ardent disciple of truth. "I'll see how she gets along, and if she ever looks worried, I'll bring out the notes. When she sees all this money, she'll be bound to feel better," she said finally.

She put the money away in the depths of her treasure chest, feeling uneasy and yet triumphant. The future was more assured

now, even though she had bartered some peace of mind to secure it.

Mrs. Hale was quite herself that day. She sat about or walked in the sunny garden, entirely content it seemed with her enforced idleness.

"Oh, it's so good to feel the sun," she told the doctor when he made his visit. "It seems as though I could never get enough of it. I shall be sorry when my vacation is over."

Betsy cast an imploring look at him, as she brought the glass of water for the thermometer. He understood and, speaking very firmly and quietly, he told Mrs. Hale the exact state of the case. "Not a stroke of work till I say so," he ended. "Sun and air and a bit of dabbling in the garden—that is all that is before you for some time. Mind you stick to it, too. I'll not be responsible if you disobey orders."

She kept up very well while he was there, but afterward she turned to Betsy, flinging out her hands in impotent rebellion. "But I *must* write," she protested. "I can't rest forever. I'll simply have to begin—" she broke off helplessly. "We have only about

enough to last the month out," she said suddenly. "One can't live without money."

It was Betsy's great opportunity. She dropped on her knees beside her mother and put two steady arms about her. She felt quite calm now that the moment had come.

"Don't you worry, Mother dear," she said. "We'll get along. Something will happen to help us. And—and—I sold the buggy this morning for twenty whole dollars. I have them all ready to give you now."

And before her mother could speak she was on her feet and had sped to her own room. She was back again in a flash with the two yellow bills, crying, "Here they are. Aren't they perfectly beautiful? Mr. Simpson says we mustn't tell Emma Clara, though, until she's seen it. He wanted to surprise her."

Mrs. Hale behaved very unexpectedly.

She took the two notes which Betsy thrust on her, and she laid them down under a book on the table without a word. She asked no questions as to the transaction, but drew Betsy close to her and held her so fast that Betsy could hear the fluttering of her heart. "My own dear brave Betsy," she whispered.

"Oh, how like your dear father! He always met the emergency, too. Oh, my dear, dear child."

"But," cried Betsy, dismayed at this indifference to the money, "aren't you glad to have the beautiful notes? Don't you just love them? I thought you'd feel so pleased——"

"I'm so pleased that I almost forgot them," was the puzzling reply, and there was a tremulous happiness in her tone which was entirely satisfying. "I shan't worry about anything now," she told Betsy with a gay little laugh. "I know it's all coming out right in the end."

The practical side of Betsy was not quite satisfied with this. "Twenty dollars won't last so very, very long, will it?" she asked soberly.

Her mother laughed again. "With what we have it will answer till I'm well or till——" she broke off though it was plain she was thinking of the book again. "I surely will be quite myself again in a fortnight or so," she ended brightly. "We'll put away this treasure safely enough till it's needed. And now

tell me about your great transaction. I didn't remember we had a buggy till you spoke of it."

It was very pleasant to recount the meager details and Mrs. Hale listened with equal pleasure. She did not even hint that her daughter might have done better to have asked permission. The confession went so well that Betsy unburdened herself of the other misdemeanor, and here, too, she found much mercy.

"Poor thing, you have had a hard time of it," said her mother tenderly.

Betsy almost wished she had been scolded. To her strict sense of judgment she was getting off too easily. The old Puritan blood within her veins demanded penance and expiation for the matter of the letter, at least.

"I shan't spend a single cent on myself at the Fair," she thought as she went up-stairs. "I won't buy any ice cream or candy or anything. I've just got to make up somehow for being so wicked."

She thought of the forty-five cents in the beaded purse in her top drawer up-stairs.

It had been saved with much pains, and it looked very large to her even now, after handling the huge sum realized from the buggy.

"I won't spend a single cent of it," she repeated. "I'll take it with me so as not to feel too poor, but I won't even look at it."

As she remembered Helen Bond's wish to meet her at the Fair, some dim foreboding of the form her penance might take aroused her fears. She shook it off with spirit. "Mrs. Bond wouldn't want to hire me like that poor Jenny Parsons," she said with a flare of pride. "I shouldn't do it, anyway."

Nevertheless she was rather uneasy about it.

Selma Worthington ran in after lunch to tell her that as her cousin would go to the Fair with her, she shouldn't be able to stop for Betsy as she had promised so long ago. As she was going she turned back to say that Philip Meade's father had died that morning.

"You know Philip, don't you?" she asked. "He brings your milk, doesn't he?"

Betsy nodded but said nothing. She felt too sorry for Philip to be able to talk. After

Selma had gone she went rather soberly up-stairs to dress. She put on her fresh white frock, and tied the blue ribbon at her collar and belt.

She said good-bye to her mother, who was so wonderfully improved by her two days' rest that Betsy did not fear to leave her, and tucking the beaded purse deep in her pocket, she started for the Fair.

CHAPTER XIII

WHAT THE FLOWER BASKET HELD FOR BETSY

“O H, how sweet!” cried Betsy under her breath. “It’s a real flower basket for sure!”

She had come up to the big assembly room of the hall in search of Mrs. Bean, since Selma was nowhere to be found among the excited hurrying crowds of workers and aids below stairs, all rushing to get into their fancy aprons, caps and other ornaments before the doors should open to the public.

In the very center of the room stood the big Flower Basket, large enough to hold many potted plants and smaller baskets, empty as yet, and in the middle of them all a flower-like little lady whom Betsy recognized with surprise as Mrs. Bean herself. She was in the midst of the green things, looking as though she had grown there, and very pink and pretty in a rose-leaf cap and green airy

muslins. Betsy stared for an admiring moment and then she hurried to her.

"How lovely it is, Mrs. Bean," she said. "It's the prettiest thing here. But how did you ever get into it?"

Mrs. Bean laughed softly, and pointing to the muslin sides of the basket, she replied, "I just crept under, my dear. Isn't it a clever idea? Mr. Simpson and his daughter helped me with it, or I never should have been able to get it arranged. It's my old kitchen table with muslin sides, painted to look like basketry, and a hole sawed in the middle for me to stand comfortably. The handle is a lattice arch that's to go in my garden when we're through with it here. We've been tremendously secret about it, and not a soul has seen it until now."

Betsy walked about the booth, admiring it from every side. "It's just perfect," she declared. "Everybody will be wild over it."

"I hope so, my dear," returned Mrs. Bean doubtfully. "I'm relying on the Highville people, though, for my sales. The villagers aren't given to spending money on flowers, I believe. Come, let me put on your regalia.

Your's is blue, you see, and Selma's is pink—just to match your frocks and ribbons.”

She held out a pretty little wreath and girdle of flowers as she spoke. “I made them out of old ones that I'd saved from my hats,” she explained. “Before I went into mourning I loved pretty colors, but I've never worn them much since.”

Betsy was too much delighted with the effect of the blue wreath to be able to speak, but after Mrs. Bean, reaching over, had fitted it on her smooth brown head and adjusted the girdle about her blue ribbon belt, she said, very heartily, “But you look perfectly lovely in pink, Mrs. Bean. I didn't know you at all when I came in.”

Mrs. Bean laughed again at this. “I might call that a left-handed compliment, if I didn't feel so flattered by it,” she replied, patting the blue flowers into place. “Now, go and see how you like yourself. There's a mirror at the fancy booth over there.”

Betsy obeyed and came back with a glowing face. “They look *sweet*,” she told Mrs. Bean. “I didn't know I could look like that.”

The big hall clock was striking as she spoke

and Mrs. Bean looked anxiously about. "I do hope Mr. Worthington gets the flowers safely," she murmured, and at Betsy's look of inquiry: "He and Selma very kindly offered to get the cut flowers. Miller's machine broke down somewhere on the road and they telephoned over that they couldn't get here until five o'clock. So Mr. Worthington has gone off to hunt them up."

Betsy was disappointed that Selma should not be there for the very beginning, but the managers and their aids were now pouring into the hall and taking their places before the doors down-stairs should be thrown open. She took her station beside the big flower basket, and although her tray, which should be filled with small bouquets, was empty and useless, she tried to aid Mrs. Bean all she could, eager to be answering questions and recommending the plants which were all they as yet had for sale.

The crowd drifted in, laughing and chattering, a goodly number strangers from the neighboring villages. Betsy wondered if Selma's cousin were among them.

She was about to ask Mrs. Bean, whom she

felt must know, when the first customer claimed that lady's attention, and Betsy postponed her question. At this very moment she saw a plainly dressed girl in a flat hat standing on the threshold, looking about with a rather indifferent air. Behind her was a woman in still plainer clothes, who loitered in the doorway, as Betsy thought, waiting for the girl to move and allow her to pass.

"It must be Selma's cousin," she thought, and, acting on a sudden impulse, she hurried over to her and spoke with a welcoming smile.

"Won't you come over to the Flower Basket?" she asked. "Selma will be here soon, I think. We haven't the cut flowers for the bouquets, you know, but they'll be here presently," she added, as the girl silently left her post at the doorway and turned toward her. "But the booth looks very pretty, doesn't it? It's quite the prettiest here, I think."

She talked the more since Selma's cousin was so silent. She was a pale, thin girl with dark eyes and very straight dark hair. She

looked searchingly at Betsy, but did not speak till they reached the booth, where Mrs. Bean was busy with her customer.

"You are Betsy Hale," she announced quietly. "I didn't know you with those flowers on you. I thought you were plainer than that."

Betsy laughed and blushed. "It's my uniform," she answered, touching the wreath and girdle. "Mrs. Bean made them for me."

The girl looked at her coolly. "I didn't mean that I expected you to be ugly," she said very candidly. "I knew you were good looking. I meant your clothes. I thought you wore queer clothes—plain, moppity sort of frocks and wide shoes."

Betsy opened her eyes at such rudeness. She should not like the cousin at all, she was sure. She wished Selma were here to take her off her hands.

"Mother believes in being quite unconscious of one's clothes," she told the other, rather loftily. She would have liked to be much more cutting.

"Unconscious," exclaimed the pale girl with scorn. "I don't see how you'd ever

think of anything else when you had that brown rig on. I peeped at your back when you were going out, and it certainly was the limit! You ought to wear flowers and fluffy things like you have today."

Betsy was too much surprised by this advice to answer at once. The plain woman who had followed them touched the girl on the arm and drew her off toward the fancy table. Betsy, looking after her with indignant eyes, saw that though the girl was dressed with great simplicity, it was with a different sort of plainness from poor Betsy's Truth-and-Simplicity dress. Justice insisted on that much.

Mrs. Bean leaned over to her, smiling down into her perturbed face.

"Helen Bond is looking very pale, poor thing," she said, compassionately. "How sad it is that she is so delicate."

Betsy's wave of indignation died at once. Perhaps Mrs. Bean, seeing something of the little incident, had meant it should. She turned eagerly. "Was that Helen Bond?" she asked in surprise, and then she laughed out merrily. "I thought it was Selma's cousin, and I wondered how she could be so criss-cross, but of course, if it's Helen——"

She broke off as another customer came up. She was thinking that since it was Helen Bond, her forebodings had proved useless. "For she won't like me at all now," she told herself hopefully. "That settles that. And I'm glad of it." She added a moment later, "though I didn't want to be rude."

Then Selma came back with her father and the flowers and the visiting cousin, all in a bustle of pleasant excitement, and Betsy forgot Helen Bond in the fun of helping. She and Selma and Adeline made the little bouquets under Mrs. Bean's directions, and the two trays were soon filled. The rest of the cut flowers were put in the vases among the small baskets, and the booth became a veritable bower.

Adeline chose to make the rounds among the crowds with Betsy and her tray, and being a very lively, active girl, she helped much with the sales. The tray was emptied in half the time Betsy would have taken to it, and they were on their second trip when they met Helen Bond.

She was buying some candy and the plain woman in black was still near her. When

she saw the two girls Helen turned to thrust her purchases into the arms of her attendant. "Go sit down somewhere, Martha," she said, in a kinder tone than she used when she turned again to the girls, waving them nearer with an imperious motion of the hand. She spoke to Adeline.

"Why don't you go help that Worthington girl sell her bouquets?" she asked sharply. "She's only half sold out, and this is your second trip." It was plain that she had been keeping an eye on them.

Adeline hesitated and, as Betsy was about to protest, Helen spoke again. "I want to talk to Betsy Hale," she said firmly. "You'll have a better time with Selma. I'm going to invite you three to supper with me, after you're through. Tell her, will you?"

Adeline had heard many tales of the spoiled Helen's whims, and, being a practical girl, she did not stop to question this unexpected invitation to sup with the young lady from the Shrubberies. Betsy was left with Helen without another word.

"And now let's get rid of your stuff," she

said unceremoniously. "I'd buy it myself, only it'll be more fun to make the people take them. Here, give me the tray. How much are they?"

Betsy was astonished. Her annoyance at Adeline's summary dismissal faded before the spirit in Helen's dark eyes.

"Five cents? That's too cheap," declared Helen. "I'll make them pay ten, see if I don't."

And she did. Whether because it was she made a very positive salesman or because the villagers were impressed by the sight of Mrs. Bond's daughter selling posies—whatever the reason was, she sold her wares with remarkable swiftness. Then she took the tray back to Mrs. Bean and handed it to her, saying, as she added a dollar note to the pile of change that Betsy was delivering:

"Please don't expect Betsy Hale back for a while, Mrs. Flower Basket. She's going to stay with me until Mother comes."

It was to be as Betsy had feared. Helen took possession of her for the next hour. It was hard for Betsy to see Selma and Adeline going about together having a very good time

with their tray, while she had to keep up with Helen Bond's rapid wandering from booth to table and from table to booth in search of something worth caring for. At first she was rather indignant at the selfishness she saw displayed so freely, and then a sort of pity for the restless, unsatisfied girl beside her crept gradually into her heart.

"She doesn't get much good from all her money," she thought, seeing how little pleasure Helen took in her purchases. "I'd be perfectly wild over that silk bag she's turning up her nose at. I guess she isn't very happy, for all she has."

Helen confirmed her by drawing her to a couple of chairs nearby and motioning to her to sit there with her. "It's awfully slow, isn't it?" she said, looking about with dissatisfaction. "I never seem to find any fun in these things somehow." Her dark eyes traveled about the room, stopping here and there on some particular person or object. "That Worthington girl is sort of nice looking, but she's a perfect frump with that pink wreath about her fat pink face——"

Betsy flashed into defense on the instant.

"I think she looks perfectly sweet," she retorted hotly, "and she's as sweet as she looks. It's a pity you weren't more like her. You're rude and selfish and you laugh at people who are twice as good as you are. I shan't have supper with you, thank you, and I'll say good-bye, if you please," and she was on her feet with her eyes snapping and her cheeks red with wrath. "I don't care for people who make fun of everybody," she added as a parting shot.

"Don't be in such a hurry," said Helen, calmly, though her face, too, flushed with sudden feeling. "I won't say anything more. I didn't mean to be horrid. Stay and be nice, won't you? I'm awfully tired today, I guess that's what made me cross. I'd like Selma well enough, no doubt, if I knew her, and how can I know her unless we have a chance to be together?"

Betsy looked at her. She was ill looking, there was no doubt about it. The dark circles under her eyes showed plainly as she raised her face to Betsy. "Well, if you promise—" began Betsy.

That was the end of it. Helen had her way.

And it was not such a bad way after all, as Betsy had to acknowledge when the four of them were seated at a small table in a corner with the assiduous aids plying them with chicken and biscuit, jelly and hot cakes, cocoa and deviled eggs, and to top off, ice cream and angel cake of wonderful lightness and sweetness. Adeline was the gayest of the party, though Selma proved Betsy's praise of her good temper by her slow, gentle kindness to the whimsical hostess, who seemed wholly bent on making her guests enjoy themselves, while Betsy, seeing how matters went, was well enough content.

After that Helen went home and she and Selma took charge of the Flower Basket while Mrs. Bean, struggling under the muslin sides of her basket, went for supper, and then in a short time the Flower Basket was sold out and her duties were over.

What a good time she had! Slow, gentle Selma and the lively Adeline were in as high spirits as she, and the three threaded their happy way among the gay crowd, growing more friendly all the time, laughing, chattering and making their purchases with much merriment.

At least, Selma and Adeline did. Betsy's purse stayed deep down in her pocket, though she longed for more than one delectable article. She would not take it out, though she felt very mean, indeed. She was glad that her penance was proving hard, since she hoped all the more to escape from her dim forebodings in that way.

One cannot run from one's fate, however, as she found at the end of the happy evening. She was helping Mrs. Bean find her wraps when Mrs. Bond halted her. She and her guests had come late but stayed long and bought largely. She was beaming with kindly patronage.

"I have something particular to say to you, Miss Betsy Hale," she said, "I must thank you for having given my Helen a very delightful time. She has taken a great fancy to you, you see, and I am very grateful to you for helping her to enjoy the Fair."

Betsy was silent. This was not very alarming. Still, she was not sure of what that charming manner of Mrs. Bond's might mean.

"Helen is lonely in her studies, I am afraid," Mrs. Bond went on, "and I have

been thinking it might be a desirable thing for you to share them with her. She has the best masters, and you could have music or—but I should arrange that with your mother. Should you like to study at the Shrubberies?”

Betsy hesitated. It sounded very well, but she felt that it was a beginning of other things. “It’s very kind,” she said, with a pretty gratitude in her face. “I think I should have to speak to Mother first, though.”

Mrs. Bond’s face clouded a little. “Of course, my dear,” she said kindly. “I merely thought I’d find out whether it would be agreeable to you. I should not say anything to your mother if you declined. Helen is rather delicate, and I suppose you might find her too quiet a companion. She does not go about like other girls, you know. She could not often go to see you, so I thought you might come to her.”

It was so delicately put that Betsy felt she had been too abrupt. A picture of her mother crumpled on the grass by the summer house flashed before her, and the sound of her lament was in Betsy’s ears.

She took the leap without a backward look.

"Mrs. Bond," she said in a queer, strained voice, looking directly into the large brown eyes bent on her. "I will come as often as I can, if—if you will pay me for it—like those others—and if you will not speak to Mother about it for a while."

Her cheeks burned and her eyes were hot with the shame of making such an offer, but she stood her ground. She did not let her gaze waver, and Mrs. Bond, looking back into her clear eyes, smiled approval, though she was plainly puzzled.

"I agree to your terms, my dear," she replied quickly. "Only I shall make some changes in the regular program of Helen's routine. You shall share her studies in the mornings, and when the spirit moves you to add an afternoon of companionship, it will be placed to your score. Each time you are at the Shrubberies, either for study or for play, will count as the whole sum I shall owe you." She mentioned the amount she intended for each visit and Betsy felt suddenly very rich.

"But it doesn't seem fair to take the

lessons and the money, too," she protested uneasily. "You see, it's quite necessary to my mind that I should have the money."

Mrs. Bond actually laughed. "We'll say no more about it, Miss Betsy," she told her. "I begin to suspect you are a miser or else you are speculating. But the money shall be yours, as I said. Shake hands and it's a bargain. See, I give you a penny to bind the matter," and she drew a bright penny from her purse and handed it to Betsy.

That was all there was to it. The affair had taken about three minutes and Betsy, with Mrs. Bean's wrap on her arm, was at Mrs. Bean's side before that small lady had missed her.

Selma and Adeline walked home with her, while Emma Clara and Mr. Simpson came as far as the beechwood copse to see that all was well.

The moon was very bright and the air was sparkling. Adeline skipped along beside Betsy, chattering like a gay magpie, while Selma's low laugh floated out constantly.

Betsy was feeling triumphant now. She had met and overcome her dread. She told



"A PENNY TO BIND THE MATTER"

her mother of all except her compact with Mrs. Bond. She laughed and chattered in a way that surprised her mother.

"I am glad you were able to go, Betsy girl," said her mother tenderly as she bade her good night. "It's been a very happy evening to you, hasn't it?"

Betsy nodded. After she went up-stairs and undressed she said her prayers very slowly indeed, and then, with her lip caught between her teeth she went over to the window-ledge in the quiet moonlight and she stuck pins very hard into the window-sill. It was the only protest she made against her fate.

She felt better after that.

"The Fair was lots of fun, though, and the Garden Party will be nice, I guess. Anyway, Mother's birthday will be glorious. I wonder what I'm to wear to the Garden Party?" she thought drowsily, but before she could even try to think she fell asleep.

CHAPTER XIV

INTERVALS AND INTERLUDES

THE next few days sped with winged feet.

Looking back over them, Betsy wondered how so much could be packed into so short a space, particularly in the quiet days at the Wee Corner; for no great change came into the life there. It was more in Betsy's own experiences that the events crowded.

In the first place, the lessons at the Shrubberies began at once. That was as it should be from Betsy's point of view. The sooner she began to earn that money, the longer time her mother should have to take her rest. She did not mean to tell her of the arrangement between herself and Mrs. Bond until after the Garden Party. In the meanwhile, it was a secret between the mistress of the Shrubberies and herself, not even Helen knowing of the bargain.

Betsy came back from her first morning

there with a sense of having escaped from bondage. She fluttered out into the meadows by the brook beyond the hill, breathing the sweet, free air luxuriantly. "Phew, I'm glad, glad, *glad* I don't live in a velvety place like that," she said to a jack-in-the-pulpit beneath the first tree she came to. "The Shrubberies looks very beautiful, but when you're inside it feels as though you were nailed in—just like a coffin. All velvet and satin, but mighty *tight*."

Nevertheless she kept her bargain to the letter and beyond it, for she tried to make Helen Bond as happy as she could. And when she failed to amuse her with stories of her own quiet life she turned to the description of others. She told her of Jimmy Delaney and his wise mother; of Philip Meade, of his battle with the delinquent James and his friendship with the late Mr. Gun of Caithness and the Wee Corner. Indeed, she talked so much of Philip that Helen grew deeply interested.

"Why don't you bring Philip over here with you?" she asked suddenly one morning while they were at their French together in

the sun parlor. "I was telling Mother about him yesterday, and she thinks he might belong to some people my father used to know. The firm went to smash and no one ever heard of them again, she says, but they were fine people."

Betsy remembered Philip's mention of the polo pony, but she was not going to have her friends exhibited for Helen's fancy. "I don't believe he'll come," she answered. "I'll ask him, of course."

She had been quite right. Philip, who had returned the day after the Fair, was very decided. "I don't play with girls," he told Betsy decidedly. "Tell your Helen to stick to her own sort."

"But you've let me go for blue-bottles and blood-root twice in this one week," Betsy reminded him.

To which he merely answered, "You're different," and went off whistling a very complicated tune. And that was an end of it. No amount of arguing could change his resolution. Sally thought that Helen seemed to admire him the more for it, but that was all that came of her effort.

A secret is hard to keep, and if they had not had the Garden Party to divert them, Betsy might have had to tell her secret sooner. The matter of garments was absorbing enough under most circumstances, but now, with the small sum that remained to them, which prohibited any outlay for new frocks, the subject grew in importance.

At last it was decided that Betsy should wear her white dress, with the addition of a fine lace collar from the past glories of the trunk, and with some soft yellow ribbons that had been found therein. With new gloves and the white silk stockings which had been her birthday present from Mrs. Warren, an old friend of her mother's mother, it was thought she should do very well. Mrs. Hale was not so confident as Betsy. She had doubts as to the fitness of the fine lace collar on the plain dress.

"It will look perfectly sweet," Betsy declared emphatically. "And I'll feel dreadfully dressed-up in silk stockings. Wasn't it fortunate that I had them? They'll just make my whole dress look lovely."

Mrs. Hale said nothing. It was plain

she was dissatisfied. But what could she do?

Betsy was very brave about the Garden Party, for in her heart she longed for a new dress quite as much as any girl could. Selma was to have a new white one, and Emma Clara had spoken of a pale green crepe—all the village was invited to the afternoon party, while only the selected were to remain for the supper and dance; and it was with tight lips and an unusual number of pins in her window-sill that Betsy kept herself from moping.

She had her reward, however, after Mrs. Warren's unexpected visit.

Mrs. Warren had descended upon them with only an hour's warning. She was on her way north and having heard of their removal to the remote village among the hills, she had taken the trouble to hunt them up. "For old time's sake, my dear," she told Mrs. Hale when she descended rather warm and breathless from the stage, just sixty minutes after her telegram had reached them.

She had stayed but one night, leaving on

the noon train the next day, and her visit had been a happy interlude. Mrs. Hale was looking quite well and Betsy was radiant. Mrs. Warren's praise of the Wee Corner had quite gone to her head. They made no excuses for the lack of servants and Mrs. Warren thought it only a temporary matter. Altogether they had a pleasant time.

"I'm glad to see you looking so sweet and well, my dear Jeannette," she said as she was leaving. "You are the picture of your mother at your age. This girl of yours is a regular Hale, though. She's her father over again. Why don't you dress her in those nice limp gowns that they are wearing now? I'm sure they'd fit her perfectly."

As she pinned on her hat she nodded out toward the row of sentinel pines that guarded the angle of the garden. "I'm going to send you a sun-dial for that corner," she told them. "Don't tell me that you will ever leave this place. It was just made for you two unworldly beings. I'll stop in to see you in the fall, and if that dial isn't in the right spot. I'll make a fuss, I can tell you."

After she had gone Betsy and her mother

looked at each other. A sun-dial for the garden, when they were so uncertain of their staying here!

"It's very kind of her," said Mrs. Hale seriously. "She was always very generous."

Betsy was glad later on that she had not said just what she felt at that moment. For two days later the stage brought a huge package to them.

They looked at it doubtfully. It was a very queer shape for a sun-dial.

"Perhaps it's a very new-fashioned one," suggested Betsy hopefully.

"It's very small, anyway," said Mrs. Hale, "and that's a blessing. Here, Betsy, cut the cords while I stand it up. Mercy, how light it is; I can almost lift it myself."

Of course it turned out to be no sun-dial. That was to come later on, the note said. The note was pinned to the hem of a lovely limp yellow frock of exactly Betsy's size—that was why Mrs. Warren had playfully measured Betsy's height against her own solid arm—and in the box under the dress, were shoes, low ones, beautiful slender low shoes with buckles on them; and yellow silk stock-

ings and a pair of the dearest gloves of the faintest straw color.

"Oh, oh, oh!" breathed the enchanted Betsy as these were handed out. "To think they're for me! Oh, it's too much all at once, Mother. Some of them ought to be yours."

Mrs. Hale laughed and sparkled joyfully. "Grown-up ladies can't take such presents, even from their mother's old friends," she told Betsy. "It's all right for little girls, even when they're on the brink of being big girls. See, here's a big square box. What in the world——"

It took their breath—that adorable hat. It was not because of its wealth of trimming or variety of color. It was a plain pale yellow straw and it had only a soft twist of silk about its crown with a couple of pale yellow daisies in its folds. But what exquisite texture the straw had, and how perfectly the silk was placed! Betsy actually wept at the sight of it.

Later on, after the package of books had been discovered and the big box of bon-bons unearthed, they found a lovely fluffy lacy

wrap that was absolutely the very thing to go with the lace dress and wide hat which Mrs. Hale was to wear to the Bond's garden fête.

Betsy fairly trembled lest her mother should refuse the gift. Grown-up ladies, it seemed, might accept scarfs from their old friends and wear them without prejudice. Betsy was very thankful for that much.

"And now, we're just perfect," she declared, as the gifts lay spread out on their bed in Mrs. Hale's room, and their own belongings were arranged after the fashion they should be worn on the great day.

A sudden fear seized Betsy. "Would the League think they were too—too pretty?" she asked with a quaver.

Mrs. Hale shook her head. "The League doesn't want us to be ugly," she explained. "It really wants us to be as beautiful outside as we are inside. Truth, you know, is always beautiful. Besides, these things of yours are very simple."

Emma Clara came in while they were still admiring. She was also enraptured with Betsy's outfit, as she had very good taste and

poor Betsy's dun-colored, shapeless garments had been a sore trial to her. She motioned Betsy to walk home with her and when they were outside the gate and out of Mrs. Hale's hearing she said abruptly, "I've got a dollar and a half of yours. What are you going to do with it?"

Betsy was bewildered. Emma Clara explained. "You've paid for the table and seats two weeks ago. You forget how many afternoons we've been reading. I've had six lessons in these last two weeks. That's a dollar and a half. I've been looking at some stuff at Higbee's and you can get enough pretty lawn for an every-day dress. I'll help you make it, as sort of a birthday surprise, you can have it for your mother's little party in the summer house. I was afraid to mention it until I saw those pretty things. I didn't know whether you'd be allowed to wear any nice colors."

Betsy slipped her hand into Emma Clara's arm and pressed it hard. "Oh, how sweet you are," was all she said, but it was quite enough for Emma Clara, who was a young lady of prompt action.

"I've got the money in my pocket, and we'll go get the stuff right off," she said briskly. "You've time enough for that, I hope?"

Betsy had time, and, rejoicing in the wonderful fortune that brought her so many treasures all at once, she saw the pretty pink lawn measured off and wrapped. She fairly gloated over the color. "I never thought I'd have a pink dress this year," she said ardently as the package was handed her by Emma Clara. "It's just like a fairy story."

Emma Clara laughed. "Being-up-and-at-it is the fairy that's done this trick," she replied. "You've only got yourself to thank for this."

Betsy was about to deny this emphatically when the sight of Philip Meade in the road just beyond the cross-roads beside the Bond limousine turned her thoughts in another direction. She saw Mrs. Bond smiling and talking with her kindest manner. She said nothing to Emma Clara, who had not noticed the little group, but she thought a good deal about it afterward, and it was no surprise to her to hear Helen say the first thing on Betsy's arrival the next morning:

“Mother saw your Philip Meade yesterday, and he’s one of the Meades she used to know. He’s coming for science and history with us this Saturday. Mother liked him awfully much.”

Betsy was glad of the prospect of Philip’s companionship for even this short period, for, to tell the truth, she had a rather hard time to keep up with Helen in these studies. Betsy had been counted the best student in the public school class, but Helen, whose whole energies seemed to have centered on her studies, was ahead of her in most branches.

“I’m glad your mother asked him herself,” she replied with a proud little lift of her head. “Philip isn’t like most boys. He’s so strong minded. He’d never have come on our asking—not if we invited him till doomsday.”

When the next Saturday morning came Philip acquitted himself so well that Mr. Hacksall, the master, praised him openly, and Betsy glowed with the pride of having been the means of bringing this promising pupil to the notice of the Shrubberies. She forgot her own hopes in his success, and she and Helen built up some beautiful air castles

on their own account. Helen declared that Philip should share their studies, and when Betsy pointed out to her that if Philip left the public school it would only retard him, as he must go back there again after the Bonds had left.

Once again Helen said nothing and the matter dropped.

Betsy had many other things to demand her attention just then, and it was little wonder that she asked no more questions.

First of all, the checks for the Shrubberies' weekly coffee had mounted up so amazingly, owing to many guests and additional attendants preparing for the Garden Party, that Betsy found herself in possession of the required amount of checks for her coveted premium. She had to call at Mrs. Barker's room and turn over the future orders to that capable lady. And then she had to notify the coffee man. She turned in her checks and then she waited with agonizing expectancy, dreading lest anything should delay the treasured gift. The coffee man had said it would take about a week to send them.

And then the pink dress required much

time and care. Emma Clara really did it almost entirely herself, but Betsy hemmed the skirt and sleeves, and gladly endured many fittings. She read to Emma Clara, too, while she sewed, "to even up," as she told her.

Altogether she was very busy indeed and very happy, too.

Her mother was growing rosier and stronger every day. It seemed that it might be but a short time before the doctor might withdraw his prohibition of the typewriter. They had given up speaking of the book. It was almost a month since it had been sent, and the publishing firm to which it had gone was noted for its prompt decisions. Betsy came from the mail that day with empty hands.

"Let's go get our clothes out," she suggested. "It'll be no harm to have everything ready. You'll have to take your nap after lunch, and we don't want to hurry into those blessed clothes. Isn't it nice of Mrs. Bond to send a machine for us? You won't get a bit tired, will you, Mother?"

Mrs. Hale turned to her with bright eyes and laughing lips. She showed no trace of

worry over the book. "Don't talk about being tired to me in this glorious weather," she laughed. "Come, our festive garments are calling very loud. Don't you hear them?"

Betsy followed her up-stairs, rejoicing in her rising spirits. "She'll be gayer than ever when she hears how much I've made at Bond's," she thought happily. "I'll tell her when we're coming home."

CHAPTER XV

THE GARDEN PARTY AND SOME OTHER HAPPENINGS

THE door clicked shut and the machine rolled off, leaving them at the great iron gates.

Betsy drew a deep breath as she looked about her. "Oh, Mother," she said in a low tone, "isn't it perfectly lovely?"

It was very beautiful.

The day was a perfect one. The long avenue at the Shrubberies was banked with palms and ferns, a green pathway leading to the flower-decked porches where the receiving party made a bright spot of color among their bower of massed green.

Everywhere there were people, moving about among the trees, chatting in groups or couples, and the light dresses of the women and the gorgeous masses of colored flowers banked here and there about the grounds made a picture that took Betsy's breath.

They followed some others to the main porch, where Mrs. Bond and her attending group stood welcoming the guests, and, oh, how proud Betsy felt of her pretty mother when their turn came to be received! How delightful it was to be conscious of a lovely limp frock and pale yellow gloves! How the precious silk stockings helped her bear up under the trying moment!

For there, beside Mrs. Bond, were the same group who Betsy had met before. The smiling lady, still in elaborate blue, the blunt-featured young man and the sparkling young lady, all were there among the group. And they looked at her very hard indeed. Betsy was fearful that her first call might be brought to mind, but her mind was soon set at rest by the blunt-featured young man's first speech to her mother, loud enough for Betsy to hear.

"Mrs. Bond says the flapper in the yellow rig belongs to you, though 'pon my soul, I don't believe it. How is it that we've never seen either of you here before?"

He glanced at Betsy as he spoke, and that ardent disciple of truth was so forgetful

of her principles as to rejoice at his duplicity. "They won't tell on me," she said to herself, and then, slipping away to join Helen in a group nearby, she gave herself up to the delights of the hour.

Helen was in unusual spirits. She was chatting with Selma and Adeline, while a group of strange girls crowded about them.

Betsy was very conscious, once again, of her yellow plumage, and she flushed a pretty pink as she came up to the group. She was not afraid of Selma or Adeline, but she dreaded Helen's comments before the strangers. Helen, for once, disappointed her. She merely introduced Betsy to the others though her eyes and the eyes of Selma and Adeline spoke very agreeably to Betsy's secret mind. She liked being looked at that way, though the words might have embarrassed her.

Altogether, the Garden Party was quite as wonderful an event as could be wished.

Betsy saw her mother from time to time walking, sitting, chatting with various people, and every time she caught a glimpse of her she grew prouder of her. To be sure, Mrs. Hale looked very pretty in the fine lace

dress and wide hat, with the filmy scarf about her slender shoulders, but it was not her appearance that most delighted Betsy. It was the grace of her movements and the sweet tones of her voice, the clever speeches she made and the happy ease with which she took her place among the group of what Helen called "Mother's lions"—the eminent professor from Edinburgh and the latest popular English novelist and the Irish lecturer.

Selma and Adeline had been especially selected from the village group to stay for the supper and dance, and, with a few of the newcomers and Helen and Betsy, they made a merry party.

They had a little table in the far corner of the second sun-parlor all to themselves and after that they were ready for the dancing when the music, which had been playing softly during the supper, began a pulsing waltz.

Betsy followed Helen, who was to be her first partner, out to the dancing floor, while Selma and Adeline took partners from the other girls. They had agreed that the first

two dances were to be interchanged among themselves.

The floor was perfect. The little lights were twinkling among the awnings that screened the dancing from the evening air, and their reflection shone like a hundred tiny stars on the polished surface at their feet. Betsy gave a little sigh of happiness as she waited for the older couples to begin the measure.

"Oh, what fun it is to dance once again!" she said. "I used to love it so, but I haven't had a chance since we came here. Isn't the music perfect?"

Helen laid a hand on her arm. "Your mother is beckoning you," she said in a disappointed tone. "I do hope you don't have to leave just yet."

Betsy sped to her mother's chair, and as soon as she had seen her face, she forgot dancing and everything else. It was quite pale, though Mrs. Hale smiled bravely. No one else seemed to notice her pallor.

"I shall have to go home, Betsy girl," she said in a low voice. "You need not come—I merely wanted to tell you, so you

wouldn't be alarmed. You will come later. Mrs. Bond will send you with the other girls. Go back to your dancing, my dear—"

"Indeed I won't," cried Betsy under her breath. "I'll go with you. Do you think I'd have a good time while you were alone and feeling sick? Why, I wouldn't want to go to heaven itself unless you were well."

Her mother laughed faintly. She had no strength to argue. When they were in the car, speeding toward home, Betsy, seeing her mother revive somewhat, bethought herself of her remaining source of consolation. She bent forward, so the words should not reach any ears save her mother's.

"Don't worry about feeling ill, Mother dearest," she said. "When the twenty dollars is quite gone, I'll have some more for you. I've been earning such a lot!"

Mrs. Hale took this news in an unexpected manner. "I suspected you were doing it," she replied calmly. "I shouldn't have spoken of it, though, until you were ready. Mrs. Bond had my consent to the plan, my dear, before she asked you."

Betsy gasped, but her mother went on:

"Of course, I shouldn't allow you to earn money in that fashion for me. It is to be used for your own benefit. We will put your earnings away for the future."

Betsy was too much astonished for words. She sat silent for a little while, trying to adjust herself to the realities. Here had she been thinking herself so secret and clever in earning money for her mother, and all the while her mother and Mrs. Bond had been planning for her! She sighed with the sharpness of the disappointment, and then, as the funny side of it struck her, she raised her head and laughed.

Through the following days she alternated between hope and fear for her other secrets. All her hopes were set on that momentous Friday. If it should prove stormy, or if the lemonade set should not arrive, how could she bear it? If her mother should be worse, or any one of a thousand accidents happen, what could ever console her for her disappointment?

It appeared, though, that all would go well. The pink dress was finished and carefully smuggled into the Wee Corner and into

Betsy's closet, where it was hidden by a sheet until it should be brought forth on the happy morning. The lemonade set came while Mrs. Hale was out for a walk and Emma Clara, who had seen the coffee-man's car in the village and, knowing it was not his regular day, had guessed his errand, had helped her unpack it in the woodshed, burning all the excelsior and other evidence in the kitchen stove, and helping hide the precious pitcher and glasses before Mrs. Hale should return.

"We can't stop to look at it now," Betsy explained, "but it'll look all the better to us—on *Friday*."

A breakfast cloth, together with three doilies manufactured from the same materials by Emma Clara's skilful fingers, lay white and smooth in Betsy's lower drawer under the paper of lavender that had been Emma Clara's gift to Betsy at the same time.

On Thursday afternoon all was ready. Even Betsy's most anxious scrutiny of the weather found no flaw in the brilliant skies.

It was the high tide of the spring time. Truly there was a new heaven and a new earth for all who had eyes and ears for it.

Betsy stood at the big box-bush looking towards the thicket where she had seen Philip grieving. "He's going to have better times now, I guess," she said. "He won't ever be so lonely again."

She saw far away over the winding road, just where it met the sky, a figure that disappeared over the crest. She sighed impatiently. "That's Jimmy—he's back again. I wonder what he'll be up to next? What a silly I was to think he had a Secret Heart. He's just an imp, that's all."

She heard the sound of Simpson's supper bell, summoning Mr. Simpson from a nearby job. She knew the harsh tones well. "What a dear Emma Clara is and how glad I am that Mother likes her so much," she thought. "I'd never have gotten through without her."

She stood very still, thinking of the happy days that had come to her at the Wee Corner. Even her mother's illness could be better borne there in their own little house, with its sunny garden and its cosy fireplace. And suddenly a great fear lest they should have to leave it, shook her, and she cried out fiercely, "We mustn't, oh, we just can't

leave the Wee Corner! I couldn't bear it now!"

She laughed at her own vehemence a minute later. "Of course, we're not going away. Even if Mother hasn't said it in words—and she wouldn't open her lips until tomorrow—I know that we're not going."

A little later she added rather wistfully, "But I'll be glad to hear her say so in real, true earnest. Oh, it seems as though tomorrow would never come!"

CHAPTER XVI

THE BIRTHDAY PARTY

BETSY woke the next morning in a panic lest she should have overslept, but a glance at the window satisfied her. The first rose tint of the sunrise was on the hill-tops, and she had the whole long precious day before her. She tiptoed past her mother's door. She could hear her regular breathing and she knew all was well. It was still an hour before Emma Clara should appear.

Betsy made what preparations she could, and then, lured by the sweetness of the morning, she slipped out of doors for a breath of the dewy air.

Unconsciously she made her way to the meadow where the brook sang. The sun was slanting level pink rays across the hills as she went, and the light changed to gold as she stood beside the little stream. The whole world was radiant with the flood of sunshine, and the sky was very blue.

A yellow-brown streak was tearing down the long hill. Mac, on his morning run, had seen her from afar and was coming to her.

She stopped to pat him and then dropped on one knee to put her arms about his neck. "Oh, Mac, you'll never, never let anyone take you away again, will you?" she said earnestly. And he looked back at her with that deep look which dogs keep for their best friends. "I never will," he tried to say. It was a compact of love. Betsy had found the companion which would never fail her while life and breath lasted.

He loped beside her as she trotted back. Emma Clara was coming in by the box-bush and there was a sound of subdued tapping from the summer house. Philip Meade was waiting for her by the kitchen door. Wherever she looked there was friendliness and joy.

She flew for one rapturous look at the table and seats Mr. Simpson was deftly fitting into place, and then she met Philip, who held out a daintily wrapped parcel. "Tin is low," he said with a solemn wink to hide his feelings. "This is just some rubbish from the woods. Don't you look," he commanded as Betsy

tried to peep at the hidden gift. "She's to see it first. Remember that."

He turned to go, adding, "It isn't anything, though." And then he came back. "Did you hear the news? I'm going to cut the Pub and if I make good, I'm to have a chance to go to college. It's great, isn't it? But Mrs. Bond won't be sorry. I'm going to work like thunder—got a job for this summer already—and I'll not take a cent more than I have to. I'll pay her back twice over before I'm done," and then he stalked out, with a nod and a word to Mr. Simpson his way.

Betsy went indoors with Emma Clara, who had heard the news, too, and who was as much pleased as Betsy. "That boy is clean goods all the way through," she said warmly. "He'll stick to his word. But it's mighty fine of Mrs. Bond, too."

Betsy was so excited she could hardly remember what she was doing. It was a blessing that Emma Clara was there or Mrs. Hale might have had to stay in her room for half the morning. However, breakfast was soon ready, and Betsy flew up-stairs for her treasures.

She got out the pink frock very carefully and smoothed her hair before she put it on. She wanted to be worthy of it. Then she found the cloth and doilies in their fragrant hiding place and hurried down past her mother's door again. "You mustn't come till I call," she reminded her; "but it'll be pretty soon now."

The lemonade set was brought out, and what a beautiful show it did make, to be sure. Betsy had not been mistaken in her selection. Emma Clara declared it to be the only one she had ever really admired. "They're such trifling looking things generally," she said. Her admiration was very gratifying.

"What a fine thing that she can't see the summer house from her room," they told one another, as they laid the lace-edged cloth on the new square table between the two new seats. "And how nice the place looks," they added, when the table was set with the very best dishes and they backed off to take the final survey. "One would never dream that the old summer house could make such a breakfast parlor."

They almost backed into one of the men.

from the Shrubberies, who was bringing a long wicker chair over the grass toward them.

"Beg pardon, Miss," he said, touching his hat. "Something from Miss Helen. Where shall I put it?"

Betsy was so intent on the chair with its wide arm for holding books, and its long, comfortable stretch of green wicker foot-rest that Emma Clara had to tell him to put the chair on the short grass beside the border. "It will be just the place for your mother to sit," she told Betsy after the man had left. "Besides, it'll hide the inside of the summer house until she gets quite near. Isn't it a beauty, though? Hark, there's the gate again. We'll never have breakfast at this rate. See who it is, while I slip inside for the rest of the things."

It was Selma and Adeline, giggling over a parcel which they handed to Betsy with, "Tell her 'many happy returns' and if she has breakfast out of doors, she'll need them," and then away they scampered, giggling. Betsy turned the parcel over. "It must be a joke," she thought, and she tucked it under

the seat beside the box that held the lemonade set, before she hurried in to call her mother.

How she trembled with delicious excitement when the moment actually came for Mrs. Hale to emerge from her room. What thrills of hope and happiness shot through her as her mother, in her "next-to-best" dress, came smiling down the stairs. "Oh, I hope you'll like them all!" she cried. "They're all outside. Come and see them—do come and see them!"

Mrs. Hale seemed rather surprised, but she allowed Betsy to lead her out. They turned the corner of the path and there were the dainty little feast and the presents before them.

It was quite as beautiful a birthday surprise as Betsy had desired. The tall pines flung their dark shadows on the smooth green of the grassy angle; the sweet scents of the late May-time wafted through the sunny air; the flicker of young leaves was on the summer house, the long wicker chair, and the seat and table with its dainty breakfast array all made a fascinating picture.

Mrs. Hale gave a gasp of genuine sur-

prise. "Why, Betsy!" was all that she could say. Amazement took her speech.

Betsy pulled her toward the summer house. "The wicker chair is from Helen," she exclaimed rapidly," and there's a present from Philip under the seat, and Selma and Adeline brought something, too. And I got the table and seats all myself. I earned them by giving lessons to Emma Clara. Oh, mother, aren't they lovely, and don't you just adore it all?" She was quite beside herself.

Her mother was just as much excited. She passed the long chair with a single approving glance, and she hurried into the breakfast parlor. She examined the table and the seats, and laughed and cried and kissed Betsy all at once. And then she noticed Betsy's pink dress and the whole thing had to be gone over again. It was perfectly glorious. Betsy hardly noticed that the table was set for only two and that Emma Clara had disappeared.

The little note on the cloth said she would be over later. "The coffee-pot is under the table on a hot brick, and my love to Mrs. Hale and many of them. It will fit her, for I made it by her old one. E. C. S."

Betsy was too stupefied with happiness to understand. "Does she mean that the coffee-pot will fit you? Or is it the hot brick?" she asked.

Mrs. Hale laughed merrily as she stooped to the long, flat box which lay beside the steaming pot. It was a soft, pink lounging wrap that Emma Clara had meant and it justified her words, for, when Mrs. Hale slipped it on over her dress, it fell in graceful folds about her. "It's just the thing for this birthday breakfast out of doors," she declared.

Betsy was intoxicated with the accumulating delights. "Open the others," she cried, hurrying out Philip's package and Selma's bundle from beneath the seat. "These first, and then——" she broke off in time. She did not want her mother to have even a hint of the lemonade set.

Philip's mossy bark basket with Anemones, Mayflowers and Quaker Ladies was put in the center of the table. "The sweetest thing he could have given me," said Mrs. Hale, while Betsy was rather silent, feeling that Philip had done a very beautiful thing.

"I was only thinking of things *to buy*," she said to herself.

She knew why Selma and Adeline had giggled so much, when her mother opened their parcel and brought out two cosies, one for tea and the other for the coffee-pot. A Chinaman in blue trousers and yellow coat was to keep the tea-pot warm, while a chubby white rabbit was to protect the coffee from chills. They were very funny indeed, and Mrs. Hale declared that any meal where either presided must have a cheerful flavor.

Then came the climax. Betsy stooped to pull out The Box.

A step on the path made her halt. Mrs. Delaney with a flat white parcel which looked much like pies, was at the door.

She smiled broadly at the festive display with: "Sure, it's the gran' day fer presents," she said. "I'll be takin' me small gift back wid me, I guess. It ain't pies ye'l be wantin' with all them golliptious dew-dabs by yer han'."

Betsy was glad that her mother spoke so quickly. "Indeed, my birthday wouldn't be complete without one of those delicious pies,"

she said earnestly. "I simply shan't hear of your cheating me that way."

Mrs. Delaney chuckled. She advanced and, carefully taking the loose tissue paper cover from her gift, she set down on the table a pie that was a masterpiece. It had pale yellow custard beneath its foam of meringue, and on its edges golden-brown crust showed, proving that it was a pie. Otherwise, one might have doubted it. For pink tracteries of hearts, and white sugary lettering made a border around the central triumph—a pair of lumpy pink hands firmly clasped together, with their finger-nails done beautifully in white sugar and a frill of life-like lace about the wrist of one and a plain white wristband on the other.

"Symbolic," explained Mrs. Delaney. "'Tis the hand of enjurin' friendship. Rip-resentin' me and the family. Particularly the family," she added, with a twinkle at Betsy. To Mrs. Hale she said, "And it's to you, ma'am, that I'm bringin' Jimmy's respects. He's askin'—of his own wish, mind ye—fer the chore-work again. Will you be takin' him back, ma'am?"

Of course they would. With that pie before them, what else was to be done?

Mrs. Hale smiled as the good woman left. "Jimmy begins to feel lonely, I fancy," she said, and then stopped. Betsy was lifting The Box.

The wrapping came off and the treasure was revealed, and in that first impulsive cry of her mother's Betsy had her reward.

"Oh, how *sweet!*"

It swept away doubt and crowned the whole happy day. Betsy did not think she could be any happier in that moment. The struggles and sacrifices that had been made seemed nothing now. She gave a ripple of sheer delight and cried, "Jemmy and I were sure you'd like it."

But Mrs. Hale did not notice. She pulled out a letter and pushed it across the cloth to Betsy.

"Other people can keep secrets, too," she said with a tremulous laugh. "You are not the only one, my dear."

Betsy did not take it in at first. And then as her eyes gathered up the fact, she looked up at her mother with a transformed face.

"They've taken it," she whispered softly. Then she broke out triumphantly, "Oh, mother, you'll be in all the book reviews! 'The gifted authoress, Mrs. Hale.' Oh, how glorious it will sound!"

Mrs. Hale tried to hush her raptures as Emma Clara came up, but it was no use. The joyful news had to be told at once. Betsy scanned the letter over and over. It was a document of so much interest to her that she could not lay it down. Suddenly she said, "But it's dated the eighteenth of May——"

Her mother laughed. "Tit for tat," she replied. "I kept my secret for a birthday surprise. People who live in glass houses shouldn't throw stones, you know."

Betsy sprang up. "It's all right now, anyway—the lemonade set and all," she said happily. "Now, I'll go get a plate and cup for Emma Clara and we'll have breakfast together after all."

She was moving off, when she came back with serious eyes. "But what about the Wee Corner?" she asked anxiously. "You haven't said whether we're to stay, or not."

Mrs. Hale laughed once again. "Why, of course, we're going to stay," she said, emphatically. Mrs. Warren was right. The Wee Corner was just made for us."

Betsy went off with her heart singing within her.

She did not know what tune it sang until she was in the sunny, old-fashioned kitchen again, but a look at the comfortable face of the old clock brought it humming into words.

"It's fun—it's fun—it's fun to keep house," the old clock ticked.

And the kettle sang a steamy accompaniment.



